Montana Travel Experience Survey, 2021 Interim Report

Kara Grau
This preliminary report summarizes select findings from the nonresident 2021-2022 Montana Travel Experience Survey. Data included here were collected from late May through December of 2021.

Data collection is ongoing, and additional reports are forthcoming. Nonresident travelers who were interviewed by one of the surveyors around the state were given this survey along with the Nonresident Travel Survey after completing an in-person “Front End” survey at a gas station, rest area, or airport. (Current and historical nonresident travel data can be viewed by clicking on Interactive Data on ITRR’s website.)

Through the end of 2021, 866 surveys were collected. Questions included topics related to visitors’ use of public lands, trip planning, and questions for first time and repeat visitors. Some highlights are summarized below.

This data is unweighted, and represents preliminary analysis and findings. Watch itr.r.umt.edu for additional updates and publications related to this data and survey effort.

METHODS

Data were collected by trained surveyors who asked questions to nonresidents as they filled up their vehicle with fuel at gas stations, when they stopped at rest areas around the state, or while waiting for their departure at an airport. ITRR has permission from over 100 gas stations and 7 airports across the state to talk to travelers during the time it takes them to fill their tank, stretch their legs at a rest area, or while in the boarding area before flights. Travelers 18 years of age or older at these locations had an opportunity to be surveyed about their time in Montana during this visit. Respondents are asked to take and complete additional surveys covering more information about their trip to the state, as well as the survey highlighted here, covering their use of public lands and other aspects of their Montana experience.
For nearly 60% of respondents, Montana was the main destination for their travels.  
9% considered themselves to be just passing through.

32% of respondents who had done some planning "More than a year ago" had planned, but then postponed their trip because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents were asked if they had been able to stay in their preferred location and preferred accommodation type during their stay in the state, with an opportunity to answer 'yes' or 'no' for up to 8 nights. The vast majority, 94%-98%, replied 'yes' to both.

*Selected responses displayed*
HOW LONG BEFORE THIS TRIP TO MONTANA DID YOU...

- While in MT on this trip
- Less than 1 week
- 1 to 4 weeks
- 1 to 2 months
- 3 to 6 months
- 6 months to a year
- More than a year
- N/A

Decide to visit MT
Start planning route in MT
Start planning sites to visit
Start planning activities
Reserve paid accommodations
Reserve activities or places
20% of travelers surveyed had stayed in an RV/travel trailer on this trip.

Most who camped did not attempt to use a public lands reservation system to book a campsite (i.e., ReserveAmerica.com, Recreation.gov), but about 1/3 did.

Of the travelers who camped, 17% had difficulty finding available camping on Montana public lands.

23% Successfully used a public lands reservation system to book a campsite

10% used, but unsuccessfully

68% Did not use

ON THIS TRIP TO MONTANA, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS BEST DESCRIBE THE AREAS YOU STAYED ON THE NIGHTS YOU CAMPED IN THE STATE?
1ST TIME VISITORS

Montana is a popular destination for repeat visitors. However, we wanted to know a bit more from first-time visitors...

Upcoming analysis will describe what motivated first-time visitors to make the trip, and what some of their expectations for Montana were before they came.

Likewise, we will analyze responses to questions about what may not have met their expectations, what exceeded them, and what they wish they had known before they arrived.

DID MONTANA, IN GENERAL, MEET YOUR EXPECTATIONS?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Better!</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>50%</td>
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HOW LONG HAD YOU BEEN WANTING TO VISIT THE STATE BEFORE FINALLY TAKING THIS TRIP?

- Spur of the moment: 30%
- A year or so: 20%
- A couple of years: 25%
- Many years: 24%
- Lifelong dream: 10%
REPEAT VISITORS

The majority of the survey sample had visited Montana at least once before their current trip. 58% of them had previously visited 6 times or more during their adult life.

More than half of repeat visitors chose to visit new areas in Montana. Forthcoming analysis will look at their responses to understand why.

Additional analysis of repeat visitor data will explore what changes for the better, or for the worse, they perceived in the state over time.

NOT INCLUDING THIS VISIT, I HAVE VISITED MONTANA...

AS A REPEAT VISITOR, DID YOU VISIT ANY NEW AREAS OF THE STATE ON THIS TRIP?

76% of respondents had visited Montana before. Almost 60% of repeat visitors had previously visited more than 5 times as an adult.
PUBLIC LAND ACTIVITIES & USES

During the 12 months prior to completing the survey, 42% of respondents had visited Montana public lands once, while 25% had visited 2-5 times, and just 8% had visited 6 or more times.

Of those who had visited public lands in the past 12 months, over half had visited somewhere in the state that was new to them, for a variety of reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary activity on MT public lands</th>
<th>Top responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sightseeing</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking/hiking</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relaxing</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Driving for pleasure (on-road/gravel travel)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping (developed sites)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife viewing</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

WHY DID YOU VISIT THESE NEW MONTANA PUBLIC LAND AREAS?

- Wanted to explore new locations
- Had more time to explore new locations
- Preferred/usual locations were too crowded
- Exploring new outdoor areas b/c of limitations/lack of safety indoors due to pandemic
- Preferred/usual locations had too many regulations; seemed constricting
- Preferred/usual locations had too few regulations, felt unsafe

60% visited Montana public lands areas they had not previously been to.
PUBLIC LAND ACTIVITIES & USES

All respondents were asked about their activities and use of public lands in Montana during the last 12 months. About 1/5 of respondents said that there were activities on public lands in which they wanted to participate, but were not able to. While many respondents selected from the reasons provided, 42% listed Other as a reason, and responses included wildfire, smoke, and related restrictions; inclement weather; crowding or lack of parking; difficulty obtaining GNP tickets.

Analysis of those "other" reasons is forthcoming. The most frequent responses from the list provided to respondents is below.

WHY COULDN'T YOU/DIDN'T YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE ACTIVITY OR ACTIVITIES ON MT PUBLIC LANDS?

*Selected responses displayed
PUBLIC LANDS EXPERIENCE

Just 3% of respondents who had visited MT public lands felt that the experience did not meet their expectations. The majority felt that their expectations had been met, and 84% were very willing to recommend their most recent public lands experience to a friend.

Respondents were asked how they learned about the rules and regulations for using public lands in Montana. A selection of popular responses are highlighted below. Full responses will be displayed in a forthcoming report.

HOW WILLING ARE YOU TO RECOMMEND YOUR MOST RECENT MT PUBLIC LANDS EXPERIENCE TO A FRIEND?

- Very 84%
- Somewhat 13%
- Slightly 2%

Posted materials at site
Previous visits
Word of mouth
Agency website
Maps
Staff/volunteers on-site
Respondents were asked about amenities or services they used on MT public lands, as well as any safety concerns they may have. A selection of items are displayed in the tables.

Displayed is the percentage of respondents who felt the item was either Moderately or Very important alongside the percentage of respondents who found the item's quality of service to be Good or Very good.

Likewise, a few safety concerns visitors may have, along with their level of concern on MT public lands, are below. More extensive analysis of importance and quality of service of services and amenities on MT public lands is forthcoming.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SAFETY CONCERNS WHILE VISITING MONTANA PUBLIC LANDS?

- Not a problem/concern
- Minor problem/concern
- Moderate problem/concern
- Major problem/concern
- Don't know/no opinion