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The Montana Expression 2021: Resident Employment, Relocation, and Outdoor Recreation during COVID-19

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2021

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The Montana Expression 2021: Resident
Employment, Relocation, and Outdoor
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MT Expression Research Report 2021-4

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7/6/2021

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The Montana Expression 2021: Resident Employment, Relocation, and Outdoor Recreation during COVID-19

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Introduction

This report is a summary of Montana residents and their self-reported use of public lands and waterways during 2020 compared to previous years. Data were collected from January 1st to March 31st of 2021. As a result of the pandemic, the number of people participating in outdoor recreation in certain parts of the country increased significantly – Montana being one of those places. Public lands and waterways, like state and federally managed parks, reported record visitation numbers for some months of 2020. In addition, anecdotal reports from public land managers and tourism partners also suggests that the level of use on public lands and waterways for 2020 was higher than in previous years. This study was conducted to determine if residents' perceptions about their personal public land and waterway use has changed when comparing their self-reported use in 2020 to 2019.

Purpose

The main purpose of this study was to assess Montanans' public land and waterway use for 2020 compared to years prior. With nearly all indoor group activities limited or postponed for much of 2020, finding refuge in outdoor spaces became a greater priority for many Americans during the pandemic. This study also aimed to understand how important Montana's public lands are in a resident's decision to live in the state as well as the role COVID-19 played in their decision to move in the past year (if they moved at all).

Methods

Data were collected by trained surveyors who asked questions to Montanans as they filled up their vehicle with fuel at gas stations or when they stopped at rest areas around the state. ITRR has permission from over 100 gas stations across the state to talk to residents during the time it takes them to fill their tank. From January 1st to March 31st 2021, any Montanan 18 years of age or older who stopped at gas stations or rest areas had an opportunity to be surveyed about their previous public land and waterway use in Montana. The respondent data were weighted by the county of residence and gender from the US Census, thus providing a representative sample reflecting the geographic population and gender of the state.

Survey design

The survey was designed by ITRR personnel and loaded on iPads for eight surveyors located around the state. The survey was longer than other ITRR survey efforts, featuring 17 questions. Eight questions addressed residents' public land and waterway use during all of 2020, followed by nine questions pertaining to respondents' residency, age, and employment. See appendix A for survey questions.

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Limitations

This study was limited to Montana residents 18 and older who either drove or were a passenger in a vehicle. During this COVID-19 data collection time period, the study was limited to surveyors who were willing and comfortable approaching individuals while wearing a mask and staying 6 feet away from the respondent.

Response rate

The response rate was 83%, with 4,508 Montana residents responding to the survey while 927 refused to participate.

Results

Respondent ages ranged from 18-95, with an average age of 48.24 (n=4,384) years old. For this study, the gender of respondents was 53% (n=2,343) male and 47% (n=2,068) female. The number of respondents by age category is shown in Table 1, the gender breakdown is shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Percent of Respondents by Age

		N	%
Average age of respondent = 48.24 years old	18-24	285	6%
	25-34	816	19%
	35-44	865	20%
	45-54	774	18%
	55-64	879	20%
	65-74	610	14%
	75+	156	4%
	Total	4,384	100%

Table 2: Percent of Respondents by Gender

		N	%
Gender	Male	2,343	53%
	Female	2,068	47%
	Total	4,411	100%

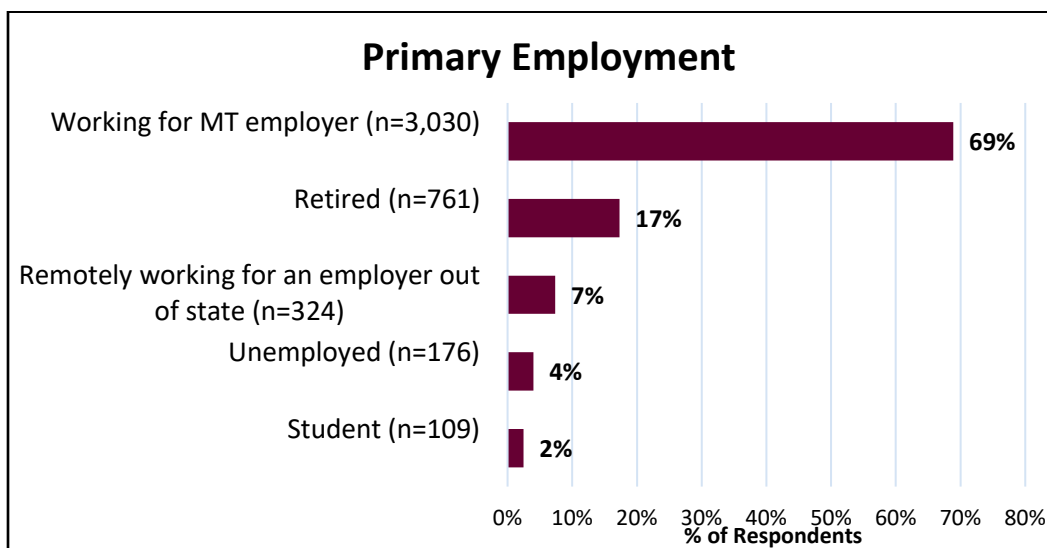
Respondents were asked to provide information regarding both their employment status as well as their residency status (i.e., full-time or seasonal/part-time). A majority of respondents (63%, n=3,030) stated that they worked for a Montana employer, followed by 17% (n=761) who were retired. Seven percent (n=324) of respondents from the survey were working for an employer out of state at the time. Only 4%

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(n=176) of respondents were unemployed while another 2% (n=109) were students. A breakdown of employment status is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Employment Status



As for their residency status, respondents were overwhelmingly full-time residents of the state with 98% (n=4,219) claiming full-time status. Of those respondents who were only part-time or seasonal residents of the state, 49% (n=49) were currently residing at their second home while another 30% (n=30) had rented an apartment or house in the state. In addition, a majority of respondents (65%, n=2,847) had also lived in Montana for at least 20 years. Although 78% (n=3,441) of respondents had lived in Montana for over ten years, 44% (1,941) of respondents had lived at their current address for five years or less. Below in Figure 2 is a display of the length of time respondents have lived in Montana as well as at their current address.

Table 3: Residency Status

	N	%
Full-time	4,219	98%
Seasonal/Part-time	95	2%
Total	4,314	100%

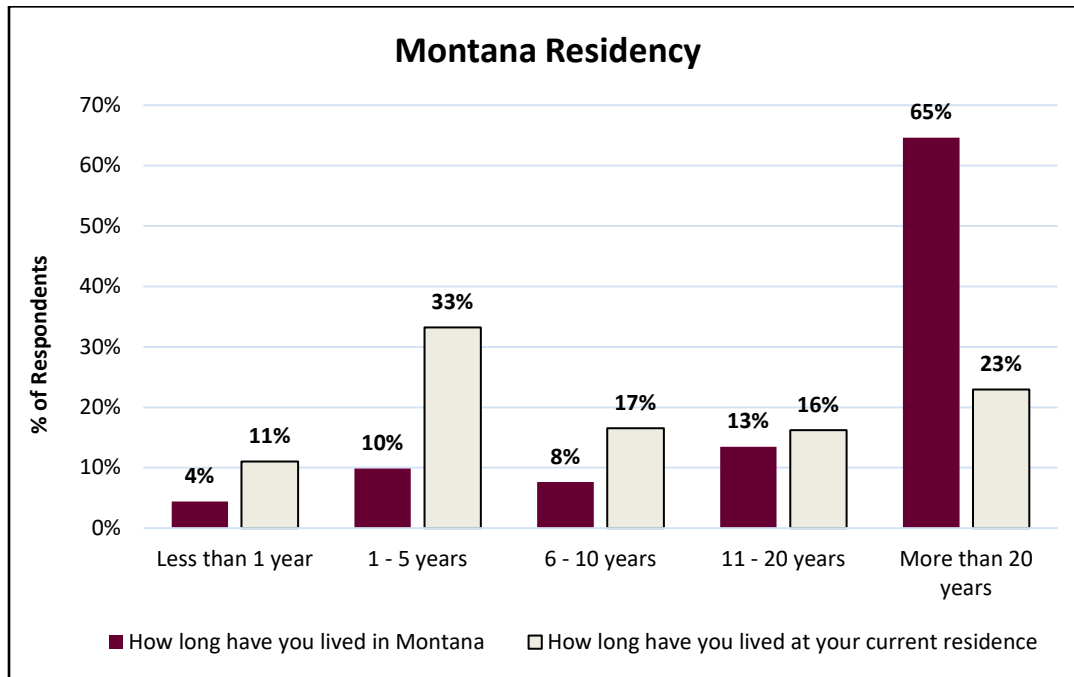
Table 4: Seasonal/Part-time Housing

	N	%
Your second home	49	49%
Rented apartment/house	30	30%
Other	16	16%
RV/Camper or trailer/van	3	3%
With friends or relatives	1	1%
Total	99	100%

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Figure 2: Number of Years a Montana Resident and Number of Years at Current Address

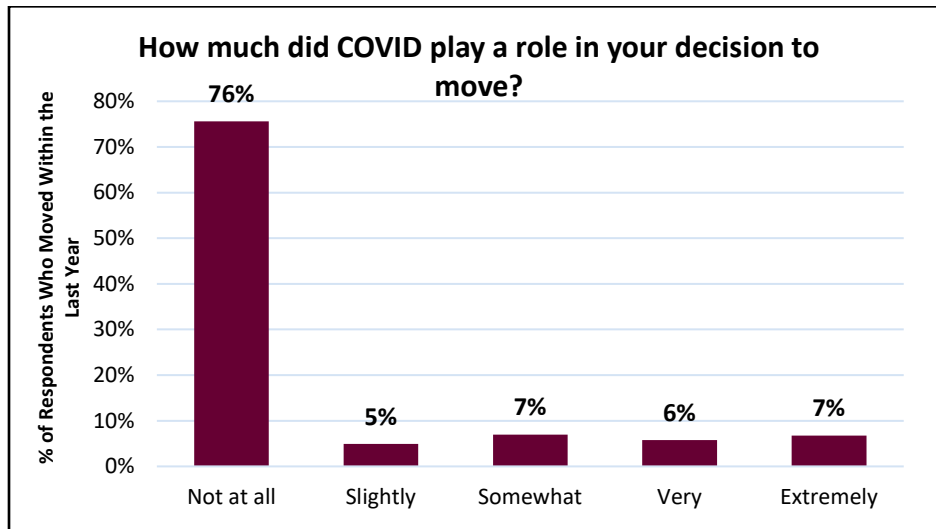


Referencing back to Figure 2, roughly 11% of respondents indicated they have been living at their current residence for less than one year. Individuals that met that criteria were asked an additional question that pertained to the influence COVID-19 had on their decision to move. Of those individuals, 76% (n=369) claimed that COVID-19 played no role at all in their decision to move. However, 13% of respondents (n=61) indicated that they were either very much or extremely influenced by COVID-19 in their decision to move to their current residence.

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Figure 3: How Much Did COVID Play a Role in Your Decision to Move



Respondents were asked a series of questions that pertained to their public land and waterway use, specifically during 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, 77% (n=3,391) of respondents claimed they participated in some form of recreation on public lands or public waterways. Of those who did recreate on public lands or waterways in 2020, 72% (n=2,428) recreated on both public lands and public waterways. Nineteen percent of respondents (n=656) reported they only used public lands while the remaining 9% (n=307) only used public waterways.

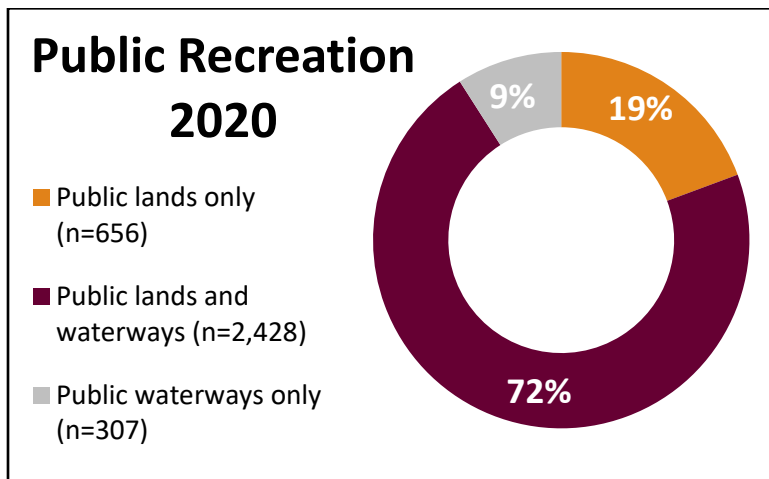
For the individuals who stated they did recreate on public lands or waterways in 2020, 37% (n=1,265) of respondents indicated that they ventured out to new outdoor locations for recreation in Montana. Likewise, another 15% (n=504) of respondents claimed to have participated in new outdoor recreation activities in Montana.

For those individuals that did not recreate on public lands or waterways during 2020, respondents provided several reasons why they weren't able to participate. The top reason residents gave for not participating in outdoor recreation on public land or waters in 2020 was simply they had no time (n=438). Other reasons that topped the list were: concerns over COVID-19 (n=320), not being interested in outdoor recreation on public land (n=121), personal health concerns (n=79) or being too old (n=61). Some respondents also indicated they did not live in Montana during 2020 (n=47).

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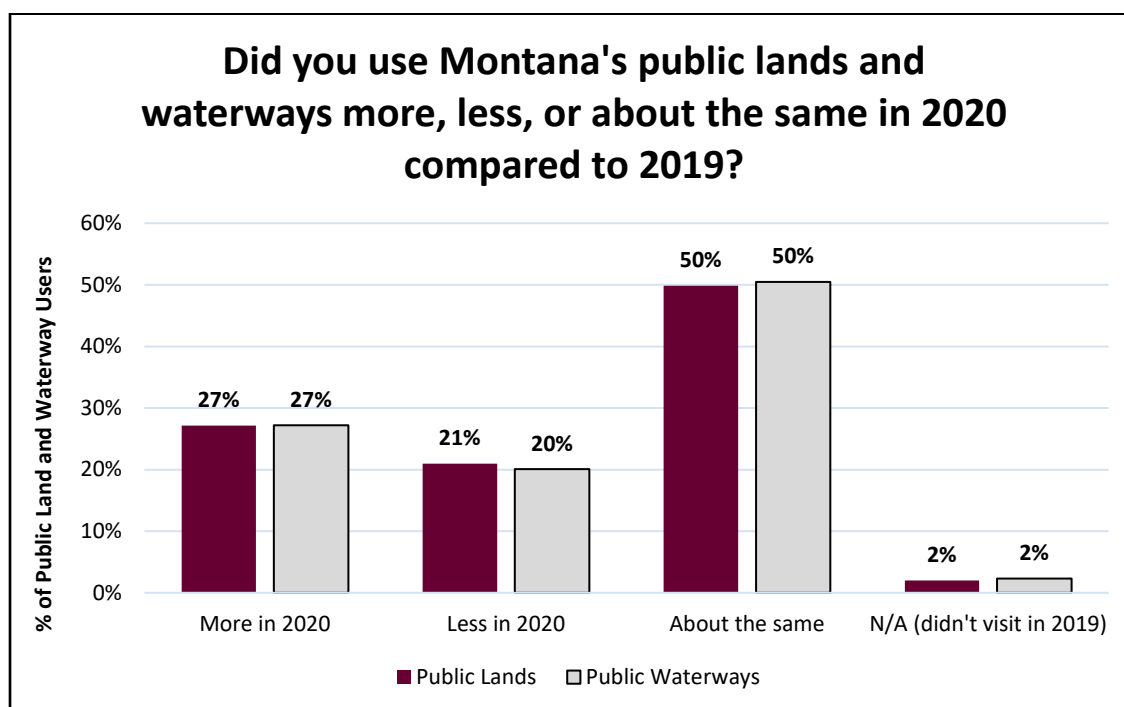
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Figure 4: Recreation on Public Lands and Waterways - 2020



When asked to compare their own use of Montana’s public lands and waterways in 2020 to 2019, half of residents felt they used both public lands and waterways at the same rate they did in 2019. Twenty-seven percent of respondents felt they used both public lands (n=839) and waterways (n=745) more in 2020, while 21% (n=648) and 20% (n=550) of residents felt they used public lands and public waterways less, respectively. Figure 5 displays a comparison of the self-reported use rates for public lands and waterways in 2020 compared to 2019.

Figure 5: Public Land and Waterway Use - 2020 vs. 2019

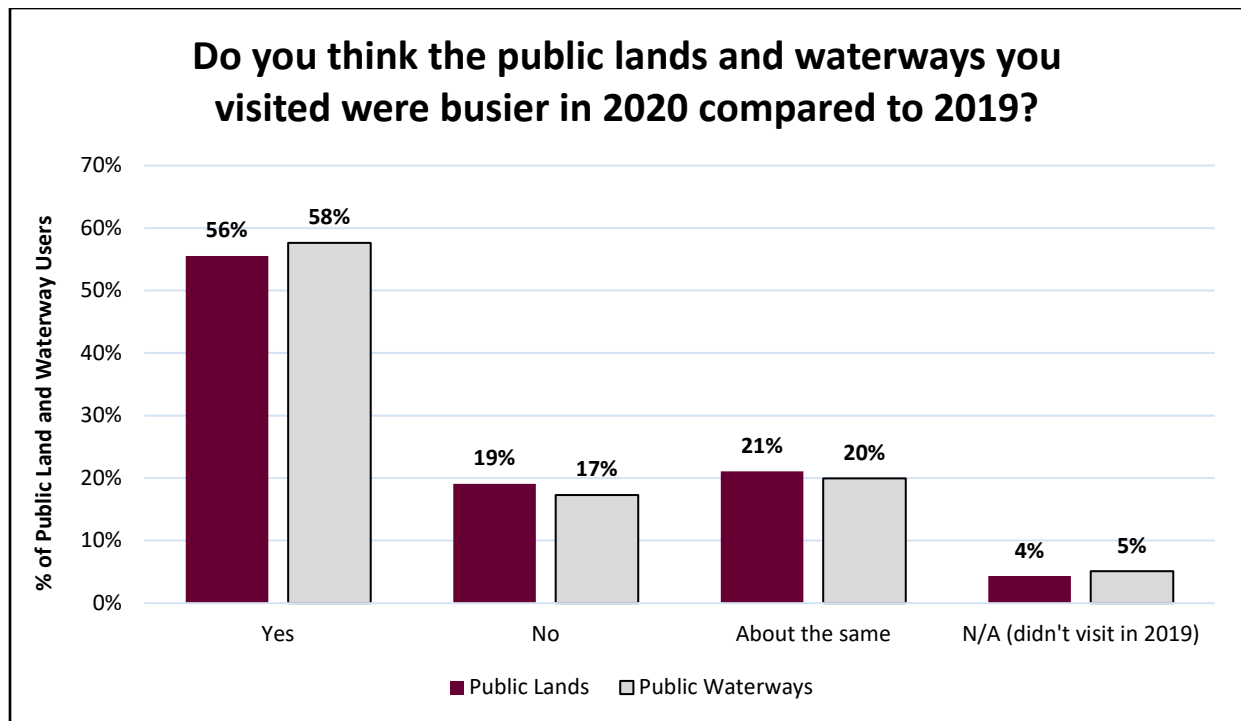


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Respondents were also asked to elaborate on the level of use they perceived on public lands and waterways in 2020 compared to 2019. A majority of respondents felt that both the public lands (56%, n=1,708) and public waterways (58%, n=1,572) they visited in 2020 were busier than they were in 2019. Another 21% (n=648) of respondents felt use on public lands was about the same as it was in 2019, while 19% (n=587) felt that public lands were not busier in 2020. Similarly, 20% (n=544) of respondents felt use on public waterways were similar to 2019, while 17% (n=472) thought use was not higher in 2020. These data seem to reflect other anecdotal information from public land managers that suggest an overall increase in the use of public lands and waterways for 2020 compared to 2019.

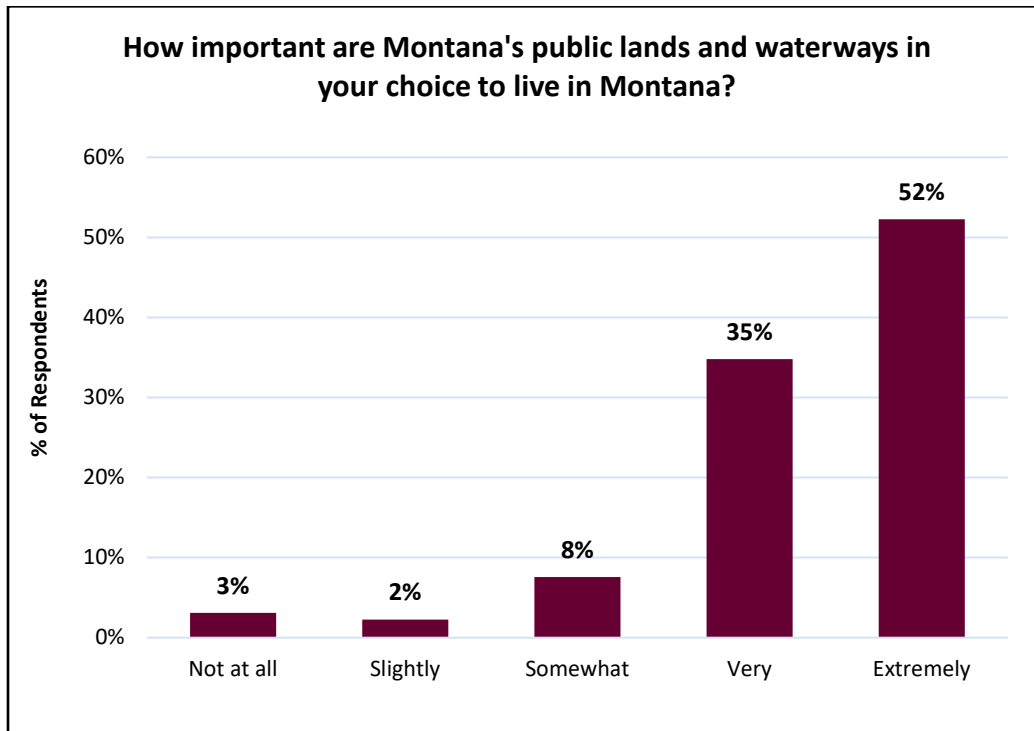
Figure 6: Public Land and Waterway Crowding Comparison - 2020 vs. 2019



Continuing with the theme of public lands and waterways, respondents were asked to comment on how important Montana's public lands and waterways are in their decision to live in Montana.

Unsurprisingly, 52% (n=2,301) of respondents claimed Montana's public lands and waterways were extremely important in their decision to live in the state, followed by another 35% (n=1,532) who said it is very important. Only 3% of respondents (n=137) stated that public lands and waterways were not important regarding their decision to live in the state.

Figure 7: How Important are Montana's Public Lands and Waterways



Summary and Discussion

Overall, this study indicates that Montanans are no strangers to their public lands and waterways. Seventy-seven percent of residents surveyed stated they participated in some form of recreation on public lands or waterways in 2020. In addition, another 87% of residents said that Montana's public lands and waterways were either very important or extremely important in their decision to live in the state. As for those who participated in public recreation during 2020, 72% used both public lands and waterways. Montana offers a unique blend of opportunity for both public land and water recreation, and it appears that a majority of residents are taking advantage of it.

Although self-reported use of public lands and waterways increased 27% for some residents in 2020 compared to 2019, respectively, 50% of residents stated they used them about the same as they did in 2019. Some Montana residents even found themselves using public lands (21%) and public waterways (20%) less in 2020. However, a majority of Montana residents felt the public lands (56%) and waterways (58%) they visited were busier in 2020 when compared to 2019. Less than 20% of residents felt that 2019 was a busier year for public lands and waterways than 2020.

As for who those recreators are, an overwhelming number (98%) are full-time residents of Montana. In addition, 69% currently work for a Montana employer while another 17% are retired. Only 7% of

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respondents surveyed were currently working remotely for an out of state employer. Of those who did work remotely, 77% have lived in Montana more than 5 years indicating that COVID-19 was not the cause of their current work status.

Finally, those respondents who had moved within the last year were asked to discuss the role COVID-19 played in their decision to move. It should be noted that this question also pertains to Montana residents who moved from one residence in the state to another, not simply new residents who moved to Montana within the last year. Of those 488 individuals, 76% said that COVID-19 played no role in their decision to move. However, 13% of respondents said that COVID-19 played a very large or extremely large role in their decision to move, indicating that some people opted for new scenery during 2020 in the hopes of escaping COVID-19. Respondents were not asked if the decision to move was related to health concerns surrounding COVID-19 or frustrations with lockdown restrictions at their previous residence.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

Questions asked Q1 2021

1. Did you recreate on any of Montana's public lands (state park, national park, etc.) or waterways (rivers, lakes, etc.) in 2020?
 - a. If no, why not?
 - b. "Other" reasons for no public land recreation in 2020 (please describe)
2. Which did you recreate on?
 - a. Public lands and waterways
 - b. Public lands only
 - c. Public waterways only
3. Would you say, on average, you used/visited Montana's public lands (just lands, not waterways) more, less, or about the same in 2020 compared to 2019?
 - a. More
 - b. Less
 - c. About the same
 - d. N/A (didn't visit in 2019)
4. Do you think the public lands you used/visited were busier in 2020 compared to 2019?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. About the same
 - d. N/A (didn't visit in 2019)
5. Would you say, on average, you used/visited Montana's public waterways (just waterways, not lands) more, less, or about the same in 2020 compared to 2019?
 - a. More
 - b. Less
 - c. About the same
 - d. N/A (didn't visit in 2019)
6. Do you think the public waterways you used/visited were busier in 2020 compared to 2019?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. About the same
 - d. N/A (didn't visit in 2019)
7. In 2020, did you try:
 - a. New outdoor locations for recreation in Montana

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b. New outdoor recreation activities in Montana

8. How important are Montana's public lands and waterways in your choice to live in Montana?
9. How long have you lived in Montana?
10. How long have you lived at your current residence?
11. Did your current residence serve as a second home in Montana prior to 2020?
12. How much did COVID-19 play a role in your decision to move?
13. Are you a seasonal/part-time or full-time resident?
14. What type of housing do you live in?
15. What best describes your primary form of employment?
16. In what Montana county do you reside?
17. In what year were you born?
18. Gender (Observe)