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What the People Think: Glacier National Park and Vicinity

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**What the *People* think -
Glacier National Park and Vicinity**

May 2003

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Introduction

Glacier National Park, with all its majesty and spirit, is home to more than wildflowers, wild animals, mountains, and waterfalls. It is the temporary home of people from all over the world who come to visit. It is the backyard for those who live nearby. It is an international Peace-Park, a world heritage site, and yet it's part of the neighborhood. The park is not a park without the people. This report will provide a window into the people who visit Glacier National Park and those who call it their backyard.

Methods

This report brings together many studies and articles that have been written over the years about people and places in and around the Flathead Valley area of Montana. It is a compilation of information from sixteen reports, most of which are research reports. The research discussed in these reports was conducted independently of the National Parks Conservation Association and therefore does not purport to support the mission of the NPCA. However, many of the findings *are* related to NPCA concerns and are brought out in this manuscript.

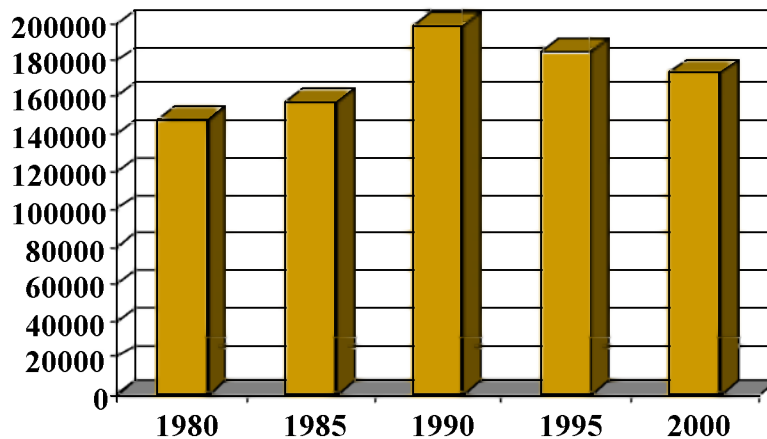
Key Findings

- In the 20 years between 1980 and 2000, visitation to Glacier National Park grew 17 percent. The number of repeat visitors to the park increased in ten years from 41 percent of all Glacier visitors in 1990 to 56 percent of visitors in 2000. This trend is indicating a strong loyalty to Glacier. People visited Glacier National Park primarily for the scenery and to view wildlife.
- During the 1990's decade, population growth in the Flathead Valley grew 26 percent with the cities of Kalispell and Whitefish growing 19 percent and 15 percent respectively. With increased population, demands for food, clothing, and shelter also increased putting pressure on available lands for development in terms of housing, services, and retail opportunities.
- Residents of Kalispell and Whitefish are attached to their communities but both groups expressed a need for their communities to maintain the small town atmosphere and preserve their surrounding natural environment. These were the reasons they lived in the area. Residents are concerned about growth issues in their region and strongly support land use planning to help guide growth in a positive direction.
- Residents of Montana agree that predators such as the grizzly bear, which is an icon species of Glacier National Park, is an important part of the ecosystem they occupy. Visitors to Glacier National Park placed a high value on grizzly bears for their role in maintaining ecological balance, both within and outside the park.
- Visitors to Glacier National Park are there to view the scenery and wildlife as well as to enjoy outdoor recreation pursuits like hiking and camping. Similarly, repeat visitors to Montana who visited Glacier National Park and area were attracted to the state for the national parks, mountains, forests, lakes, and open spaces. Yet, 21 percent of return Glacier National Park visitors expressed concern about the decreasing amount of open space, 12 percent said the amount of wildlife viewing opportunities was worsening, and 11 percent said the condition of the natural environment was declining.
- With population growth increasing in the Flathead, and population growth increasing in all the states where Montana tourists reside, growth in the Flathead Valley will continue. This growth naturally relates to land expansion and pressure on the open spaces and natural beauty treasured by residents and visitors. Residents of the valley appear to be ready to work towards maintaining the reason they live here.

Growth & Visitation – Glacier National Park

First they came by foot and horseback. Then by train. Within the park, they still traveled on horse or foot or by steamboat in Lake McDonald (Robinson, 1960). The advent of the automobile changed the park and its visitors. It opened the access to more people. However, it was the completion of the Going-to-Sun-Road from the west side in 1929 when it showed: an additional 19,000 people visited Glacier National Park that year. Since then, visitation has generally been on the increase. While visitation numbers in the park have fluctuated over the years, the general trend is upward. In the past 20 years alone (1980-2000) there has been a 17% increase in visitation at Glacier. Visitation will most likely continue on an upward trend as population in the United States, especially the western states, increases.

**Figure 1: Glacier National Park
Visitation Trends: 1980-2000**



Numerous studies throughout the years have gathered information about people who visit Glacier National Park. These studies tell a story of who is coming, their reason for being there, likes and dislikes, and their economic contribution to the region. While there is some variation in visitor data over the years, in general, the visitor has not changed much in the past decade. The shaded boxes on the next page summarize data gathered directly from visitors in the Park.

It is interesting to note the residency of the visitors. Montanans represent between 11 and 20 percent of visitors depending on the survey time frame. In addition, first time visitors ranged from a low of 44 percent of the visitors to a high of 59-60 percent of visitors. These differences, while quite large, could be explained by when the survey was conducted. For example, data for the 2000 Socio-Economic report was collected the last week of August. Many people at this time of year are back home with children in school. This would reduce the numbers of families who could be visiting the park. The findings in these reports continually show that people travel to Glacier National Park for the scenery, the wildlife and outdoor pursuits such as hiking and camping.

1990 Visitor Data (Littlejohn)

- 59% were visiting Glacier for the first time
- 80% went to Logan Pass
- 43% had two people/group, 20% had four people/group
- 13% from MT, 12% Canada, 8% WA, 6% MN and CA.
- 49% said GNP was their primary destination
- Activities: 97% sightseeing, 89% wildlife viewing, 72% visiting visitor centers/museums.
- Primary reason for visiting GNP was to view wildlife/scenery for 65% of visitors.
- \$253/group spent in the Glacier area per trip.

1994 Visitor Data (Miller & McCool)

- 60% were first time visitors in the summer.
- 83% visited Logan Pass.
- Length of stay for summer visitors was 4 nights.
- 2.7 people per group in summer.
- 11% from MT, 9% CA, 8% WA, 7% from Canada, 1% from Idaho
- Reasons to visit: 96% enjoying natural scenery, 81% viewing wildlife, 71% doing things with family and friends, 70% learning and discovery, 65% change of daily routine, 60% rest and relaxation.
- 45% of summer visitors said the most satisfying part of their visit was the scenery (highest stated)

1997 Visitor Study (Peccia)

- Average length of stay – 3.2 days for nonresidents, 1.6 days for local Montanans.
- 19.5% were from Montana, 12% from Canada (80.5% are nonresidents of MT).
- 66% stopped at Logan Pass, 82% drove over Logan Pass
- 43% stayed overnight in the park, 57% stayed overnight at a location outside the park in the immediate area.



1999 Visitor Survey Card

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with their sightseeing experience in Glacier.
- 95% of respondents were satisfied with the outdoor recreation experience in Glacier.
- 87% were satisfied with their learning about nature, history, or culture in Glacier.



2000 Going-to-Sun-Road Socio-Economic Report

- 44% were in Glacier for the first time
- 76% of the summer respondents went to Logan pass
- Primary reason for visiting GNP was to view scenery (63%), 16% visited to participate in recreation such as hiking, biking, boating, camping, etc.

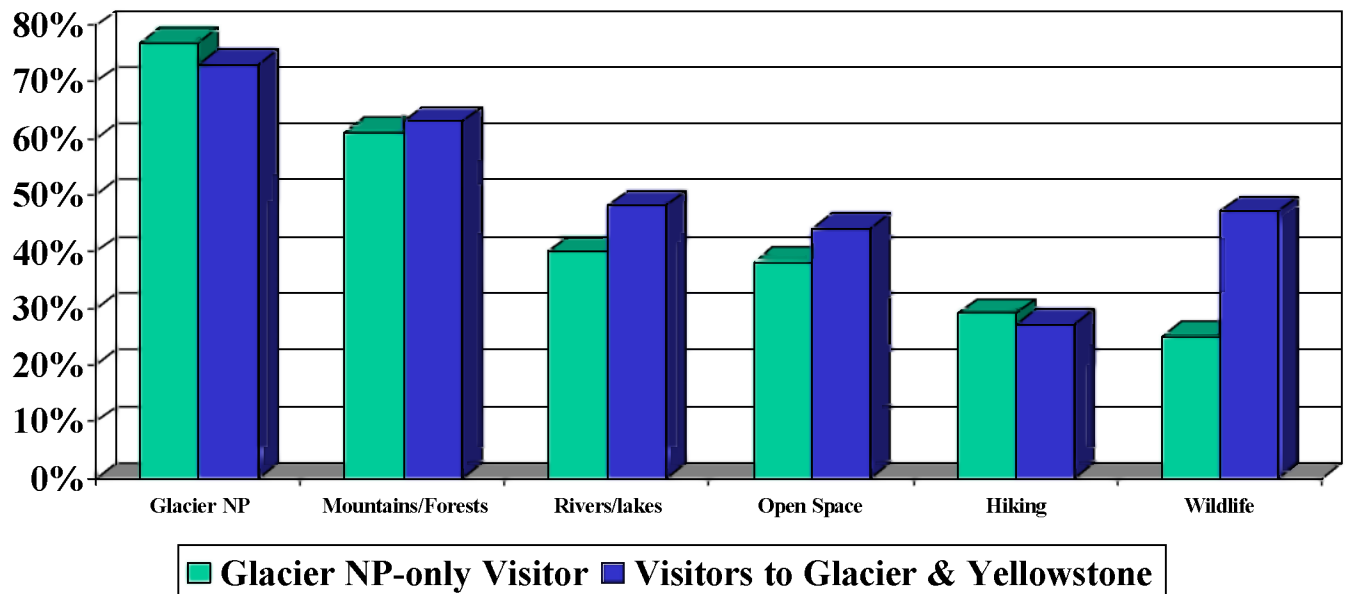
All of these studies have focused on surveying visitors *in* Glacier National Park. In a related but different slant to park visitors, the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at the

University of Montana (Nickerson 2002) published a report on nonresident visitors to *Montana* who visited Glacier, Yellowstone, or neither park while in Montana. Interesting results emerged.

Visitors to Montana who went to Glacier National Park-only represented 14 percent of nonresident summer visitors. However, when the visitors who went to both parks were added in to the equation, 1/3 of all nonresident summer visitors to Montana visited Glacier National Park.

Nonresident visitors to Montana who visit Glacier are attracted to the state for the national parks first and foremost. This is followed by an attraction to mountains/forests, rivers/lakes, open space/uncrowded areas, hiking, and wildlife (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Non-Resident Visitors to Glacier NP-only & Visitors to both GNP and Yellowstone: What Attracted Visitors to MT



Nonresidents who visited Glacier National Park-only spent 6.12 nights in the state with 71 percent of their overnights in the Glacier Country Region (a travel region that extends from the east side of Glacier NP down through the Seely-Swan and through Missoula to Lost Trail Pass). Those who visited both parks spent 6.95 nights in Montana with 46 percent of their overnights in the Glacier Country Region.

Visitors to GNP were in Montana for vacation 71 percent of the time and 14 percent were here to visit friends and relatives. Similarly, those who visited both parks said vacation was their primary reason (72%) followed by visiting friends and relatives (11%). Compared to those in Montana for other reasons, vacationers tend to spend the most money while in the state. Visitors to the Glacier area were found to spend \$556.50 per group while in Montana (Nickerson & Nickerson 1998).

As shown, there is growth in visitation numbers to Glacier and the type of visitor is one who wants to have scenic beauty and untouched nature available for their viewing. Visitors, time and time again through a variety of studies, indicate that the mountains and forests, rivers and lakes, open space and uncrowded areas are what draw them to Montana. Glacier National park provides all these amenities to the visitor.

Couple from Idaho describing Montana:

“To me [Montana is] the last bit of wilderness in the lower 48, the biggest. Open spaces, uncrowded, not polluted, beautiful blue skies. Lakes. I like the wildness of it. I like the fact that you still have grizzly bears in the area. That's kind of neat. I guess wolves are in the area, right? It's just a wildness of it. And the mountains. The mountains are just awesome, just spectacular.”

2002 Montana's Nonresident Vacationer Experience Study

Growth & Attachment – Flathead Valley

Park visitation is not the only growth area. The populations of Flathead County and Montana have also been on a growth spurt. In the past decade alone Flathead County grew nearly 26 percent from the 1990 census to the 2000 census. Montana as a whole grew at half that rate, 13 percent. Kalispell city grew 19 percent and Whitefish city grew 15 percent in the '90's decade. Flathead County now has the fourth largest population count of all Montana counties. The story behind the population increase can probably be tied to many aspects: the amenities in the region, the ability for people to work from home but be employed out of state, the good economy tied with early retirements and the purchase of vacation homes, and finally, the fact that growth breeds growth. As people move in, more services are required and demanded from the marketplace.

One aspect that has emerged from studies conducted in the Flathead Valley is the commitment and attachment to their community. This helps explain why people live and stay in the Flathead Valley.

In a recent study conducted by the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research at The University of Montana (Dillon & Praytor 2002), Kalispell residents were asked about quality of life issues in Kalispell, tourism attitudes, and development threats/opportunities. Residents of Kalispell, like residents of the state as a whole, have a strong attachment to the community in which they reside as seen on four indicator questions (Table 1).

| Table 1: Community Attachment | Kalispell Mean* | Statewide Mean* |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| I'd rather live in my community than anywhere else. | 0.72 | 0.78 |
| If I had to move away from my community, I would be very sorry to leave. | 0.86 | 0.76 |
| I think the future of my community looks bright. | 0.27 | 0.26 |
| It is important that the residents of my community be involved in decisions about tourism. | 1.49 | 1.24 |
| Index of Community Attachment** | 0.84 | 0.76 |
| *Scores represent mean responses on a 4-point scale from -2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree) | | |

An average Community Attachment rating of 0.84 indicates these people like where they live. They were positive in their feelings about their community, even in regards to opinions about the future. However, at 0.27, this item received the lowest score, indicating that residents have less confidence when it comes to the future of Kalispell.

Attitudes about Glacier National Park

Visitors to Glacier, whether residents of the valley or out-of-state residents, have shown a strong attachment and love for the park.

Visitors

Visitors to Glacier National Park notoriously enjoy their experience (Visitor Survey Card 1999). Whether there for a repeat visit or for the first time, Glacier is loved. However, the high occurrence of repeat visitors to the park points even more directly to a positive attitude about the park. The number of repeat visitors to Glacier increased from 41 percent of all Glacier visitors in 1990 to 56 percent of visitors in 2000. This trend is indicating a strong loyalty to Glacier.

Similarly, in the study comparing Glacier, Yellowstone and non-park visitors (Nickerson 2002), repeat visitation showed significant difference between people who visit Glacier-only and those who visit both parks. A substantial 82 percent of Glacier-only nonresident visitors had been to Montana previously while only 65 percent of both-park visitors were repeat visitors to Montana. This tends to show that when visitors come to Montana for the first time, they are more likely to visit both parks while they are here. If they are here as a repeat visitor, they go to Glacier. This trend could point to a “favorite park” theory. When they return to the state, they visit Glacier.

Other feelings about the park are reflected in the *Backpacker* magazine poll. In 2000, readers of *Backpacker* rated Glacier National Park as the number one backcountry park in America. The park is valued as a place to hike where one can easily leave the trace of civilization behind. On the flip side, the hand of civilization is very much appreciated by travelers on the historic Going-to-the-Sun Road. Travelers treasure the road as a marvel...an opportunity to “get into” the mountains. Giordano (2002), interviewed travelers on the Sun highway and found their road

experience in the park to be extremely satisfying and enlightening. As stated by one cyclist on the road: *“(This is) probably the most beautiful, one of the most beautiful places in America, and my body, my brain, and my spirit just feel better at 6600 feet. All this beauty – I mean it’s a really unique part of the world. Done a lot of travel to 70-80 countries and this is really unique terrain. The mountains are just gorgeous, I don’t think you can find shapes like this.”*

Finally, in a master’s thesis on hikers in Glacier National Park, (Van Ormer 2002) hikers perceived grizzly bears as a valuable component of the park and one of the reasons they were hiking in the park. In addition, the need to preserve landscapes beyond the boundaries of the park, were seen as important for respondents of the study.

In all reports, park visitor satisfaction is high. People have a positive feeling about the park and enjoy the beauty it provides.

Residents

Similar to visitors, residents of the Flathead have positive feelings about Glacier National Park as evidenced in the study conducted by Dillon and Praytor (2002) on resident attitudes toward tourism. One question asked Kalispell residents where they take people who come to visit them. At the top of the list was Glacier National Park. Thirty percent of all respondents indicated taking their friends and relatives to the park when visiting. This was followed by 16 percent who said they take visitors to Flathead Lake and nine percent who indicated Big Mountain.

As shown previously by visitors, part of the allure as well as the glue that keeps the Glacier Park vicinity intact is the presence of predators, especially grizzly bears. In a study related to attitudes of residents toward predators (Patterson, et.al. 2003), Montana residents showed a healthy relationship with grizzly bears, mountain lions and wolves. As seen in Table 2, the grizzly bear and mountain lion are seen more favorably than wolves, however, even wolves are viewed as important to the ecosystem. Fifty-three to 63 percent of Montana residents agreed with the statement that grizzly bears, mountain lions, and wolves are an important part of the ecosystem they occupy.

Table 2: Attitudes Toward Wildlife

| | MONTANA | | | |
|--|--------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------|
| I would like to see populations of these animals increase in my area: | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Mean |
| Grizzly Bear | 20.6% | 22.3% | 57.1% | 3.75% |
| Mountain Lion | 18.1% | 25.3% | 56.6% | 3.78% |
| Wolves | 17.0% | 18.4% | 64.7% | 3.95% |
| These animals are an important part of the ecosystem they occupy: | | | | |
| Grizzly Bear | 63.1% | 13.5% | 23.4% | 2.44% |
| Mountain Lion | 62.8% | 14.9% | 22.3% | 2.41% |
| Wolves | 53.4% | 14.5% | 32.2% | 2.72% |
| These animals attract tourists to my state: | | | | |
| Grizzly Bear | 59.4% | 18.1% | 22.4% | 2.47% |
| Mountain Lion | 47.8% | 23.6% | 28.5% | 2.76% |
| Wolves | 51.4% | 20.6% | 28.0% | 2.68% |

It is interesting to note that while most residents do not want any of the three predators to increase in their area (possibly perceived as their immediate backyard), they supported the statement that these predators were an important part of the ecosystem. Therefore, they presumably see a balance, currently, with the number of predators and what the ecosystem can sustain. Adding more of these predators would most likely create an imbalance. In addition, Montana residents were more likely to agree that these predators, especially the grizzly bear, attract tourists to their state putting an economic value on these animals.

Grizzly bears, mountain lions, and to some extent wolves are all a part of the Glacier National Park ecosystem. These animals are part of the “amenity” package that comes with living in the area.

In terms of the people’s attitude toward Glacier National Park, visitors to the park keep coming back. They see it as a place to visit time and time again. Backpackers treasure the park and all hikers see the grizzly bear as essential to the ecosystem. Residents of Kalispell view Glacier as a wonderful place to share with their friends and family. Residents of Montana believe that the predators are important to both the ecosystem and the economy. Glacier National Park fits into this discussion as one of the amenities people value. Its scenic beauty provides a backdrop for outdoor recreation pursuits, spiritual connections, and family togetherness. Even the presence of predators is accepted as it indicates the ecosystem is intact.

Glacier, by virtue of it being a national park, assures residents of this state of its continual care and permanence as a place to visit. It is one of the few places that residents know will not be lost to development and urban sprawl. It is an oasis.

Priorities and Concerns Today and for the Future

Population growth and increases in visitation do not come without growing pains. While visitors and residents have strong attachments to the area, concerns are being expressed concerning the valley. Residents and visitors alike are beginning to share the sentiment that priorities need to be established for protecting the natural values of the area.

Visitors

In the Nonresident Visitor research report, Nickerson (2002) asked questions of returning nonresidents. Visitors were asked to indicate how they felt Montana had changed over time for 12 different features. The visitor could respond, “better,” “same,” “worse,” or “don’t know.” The “don’t know” respondents were removed from the summary and mean response totals. Most of the features were visitor services but some related to other things that could affect their experience.

Of the 12 features, only three received “worse” ratings from ten percent or more of the respondents. These features were the “condition of the natural environment,” wildlife viewing opportunities,” and “amount of open space” (Table 3). Visitors to Montana see the amount of

open space decreasing more than any other feature followed by wildlife viewing opportunities and the condition of the natural environment. These statements by nonresident should serve as a red flag. Here are returning visitors to the state who drop enormous amounts of dollars into the state economy indicating that some things, which attracted them in the first place (environment, wildlife, & open space) are starting to dwindle.

Table 3: Summary Table of Mean Response to Changes in Montana*

| Nonresident Visitors to Montana | Condition of the Natural Environment | | | | Amount of Wildlife Viewing Opportunities | | | | Amount of Open Space | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|------|--|--------|---------|------|----------------------|--------|---------|------|
| | % Better | % Same | % Worse | mean | % Better | % Same | % Worse | Mean | % Better | % Same | % Worse | Mean |
| Glacier-only Visitors | 25% | 64% | 11% | 1.86 | 19% | 69% | 12% | 1.94 | 11% | 68% | 21% | 2.09 |
| Yellowstone - only Visitors | 21% | 66% | 13% | 1.92 | 20% | 68% | 12% | 1.92 | 7% | 66% | 27% | 2.20 |
| Both park Visitors | 16% | 73% | 11% | 1.95 | 26% | 67% | 17% | 1.81 | 9% | 74% | 17% | 2.08 |
| Neither park Visitors | 20% | 69% | 10% | 1.90 | 18% | 70% | 12% | 1.94 | 8% | 70% | 22% | 2.14 |

*1=better condition, 2=same condition, 3=worse condition

To add to the weight of that statement, a 2001 Internet conversion study commissioned by the Montana Department of Commerce asked Internet users to rank the top five images (out of a list of 25) that come to their mind when describing a Montana vacation. The top three vote getters were all related to the environment:

- 70% said natural beauty/scenery
- 58% said mountains
- 55% said visit national parks/sites

The image of Montana by nonresidents is natural beauty, mountains and national parks. People are attracted to Montana for the national parks, open space, mountains, forest, wildlife, rivers, and lakes. Yet, a small but significant number of nonresidents have declared the environmental conditions in the state to be worsening.

The natural environment of Montana and the economy of Montana are tightly linked. A degradation in Montana’s environment could encourage residents to move elsewhere at the same time that nonresidents would look elsewhere for the beauty and open space they seek.

The quote on the following page by a visitor to Montana puts the concern into perspective:

Couple from California describing Montana:

“I wouldn't drive up the Flathead Valley again. You know, it's just, there's too much sprawl. It looks too much like California. [Montana is] populated and beautiful. It was more populated than I expected it to be. Or at least sprawl. There's a lot more sprawl than I expected, [especially in the] Flathead Valley for sure. Really, I mean Missoula basically to Whitefish looks a lot like Oregon. It looks a lot like California. Where little towns stop being little towns and there's kind of sprawl. I haven't been here since '61, so it's been a long time. But I was surprised at how many people and kind of how much spread of suburban Montana there was. And I would say, for me I think my expectation was that it was going to be a little wilder than it was. And that was a little bit of a disappointment.

I'm not sure I would say don't go because of that. I would say, well, you know, if you're looking for really wild, I'd probably go to the big parks or I'd go someplace kind of different than where we were. One of the differences, coming from an earlier populated state is there's been a preservation movement and a land use movement in California that's way ahead of Montana. We hiked up to Rocky Point Lookout, you know, a five-mile hike through the snow, two hours of climbing. We get up there and it's pretty, but it's two-thirds clear cut. A lot of clear-cut. You get up to a big vista and you see logging. That's a little disappointing. And so I think that was the goal, to get up to Glacier. And when I talk about open space, that's getting up and looking from a ridge or from a peak and seeing just nature.”

2002 Montana’s Nonresident Vacationer Experience Study

Residents

Residents have a strong opinion about the lands that surround their community (Table 4). According to Dillon and Praytor (2002), Kalispell residents are concerned about the amount of open space and undeveloped land. To address this concern, both Montana residents as a whole and Kalispell

| Table 4: Land and Land Use Regulations | Kalispell | | | Statewide | | |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------------------|
| | Dis- agree | Agree | Mean Score * | Dis- agree | Agree | Mean score * |
| There is adequate undeveloped open space in my community. | 58% | 42% | -0.31 | 41% | 59% | 0.21 |
| I am concerned with the potential disappearance of open space in my community. | 24% | 76% | 0.91 | 40% | 60% | 0.37 |
| I would support land use regulations to help manage types of future growth in my community. | 20% | 80% | 0.84 | 22% | 78% | 0.68 |

* Scores represent mean responses on a 4-point scale from -2 (strongly disagree) to +2 (strongly agree).

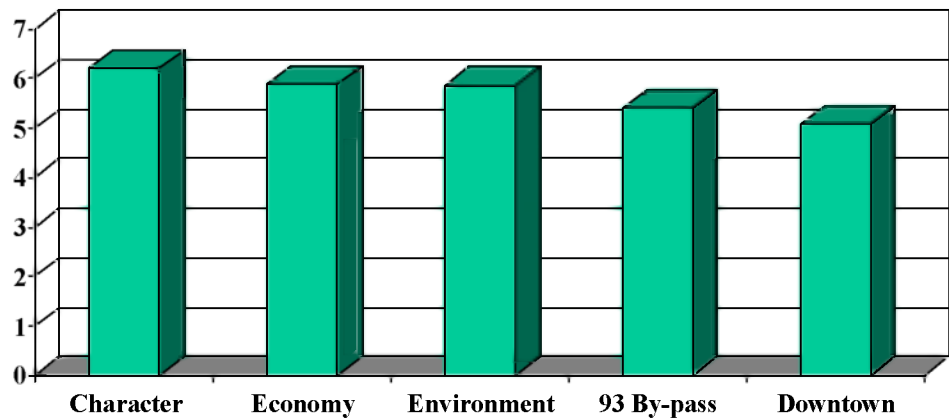
residents would enthusiastically support land use regulations to help manage types of future growth in their community (80% and 78% respectively). Seventy-six percent said they were concerned with the potential disappearance of open space in their community – a sixteen percent higher concern than statewide residents.

In the same survey, residents of Kalispell were asked to rate important issues for the future of Kalispell (Figure 3). Nine items were presented for the respondent to rank one through nine with one being the least important. The issue receiving the highest ranking was “maintaining the existing character of Kalispell” with a mean of 6.2. This was followed with “diversifying the Kalispell economy” and “protecting the natural environment” with means of 5.89 and 5.87 respectively.

When Kalispell residents were asked to identify the characteristics they value most about their community and local area, the top vote getter was the small town/friendly atmosphere followed by the scenery/outdoor/open space. These were identified through an open-ended, unaided question. The top disliked characteristic about Kalispell was the retail growth plan/business growth. Evidently, residents of Kalispell are becoming concerned about their small town sprawling into their open spaces.

In summary, Kalispell residents appear to be very attached to their community and have a desire to keep it the community they have come to know. They enjoy the character and small town atmosphere and view that as the most important future issue to preserve.

Figure 3: Most Important Issues for Kalispell’s Future*



*Mean ranking on a 1-9 scale

However, they also see the need to diversify the economy while at the same time preserving and protecting the natural environment that surrounds them. Glacier National Park was mentioned numerous times throughout the study as a place to visit, to bring visitors, and to market as a tourist draw which in turn aids the economy.

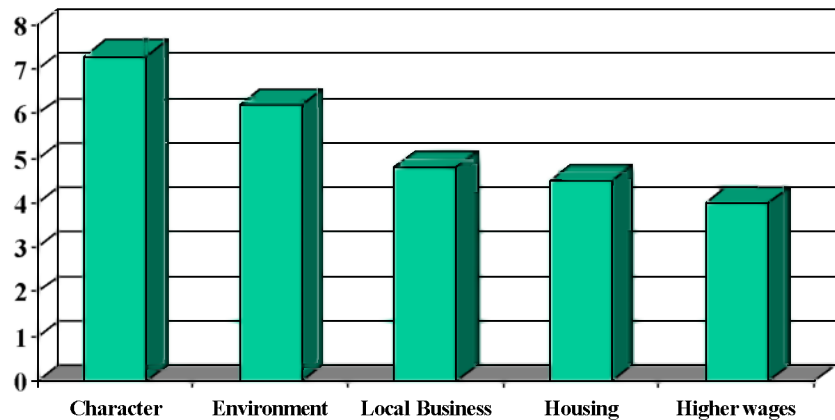
Similar results were found in a separate study conducted by the Hingston Roach Group (2001) for the city of Whitefish. The majority of the residents surveyed, (54%), cited “small town size/ atmosphere, strong sense of community, and friendly people” as the most desirable aspect of living in Whitefish. This was followed by 18 percent who thought opportunities for recreation and access to the outdoors were the most desirable aspects of living in Whitefish. Seventeen percent indicated the area’s scenic beauty, natural setting, and location of the town as the best reasons for living in Whitefish. Four percent mentioned concerns about growth and other negative impacts on desirable qualities of community.

Interestingly, the aspects rated as the most important issues for the future of Whitefish were maintaining the character of Whitefish followed by protecting the environment (Figure 4). While Kalispell residents rated those two aspects as one and three, diversifying the economy was number two. Whitefish residents, however, believed the third most important aspect for the future of Whitefish to be supporting the local business growth.

Residents in both Whitefish and Kalispell have similar concerns and similar issues for the future of their communities. Both are concerned with growth, especially unplanned growth. Both want to preserve their small town character and the natural environment around them.

Going beyond the immediate Glacier Park region, other studies have found similar results related to Montana values and concerns. In a study funded by the Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund (2002), an open-ended question, “Generally speaking, what do you like best about living in Montana,” found a full 39 percent said, “not overpopulated/wide open spaces. This was the value mentioned *most frequently* followed by the “natural surroundings/scenery” with 25 percent indicating this value about living in Montana. In this same study, 78 percent of the residents agreed with the statement that we could have a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time without having to choose one over the other. This was up from 71 percent in 2000.

Figure 4: Most Important Issues for Whitefish’s Future*



“As long as Whitefish remains a desirable place to live, its economic future is assured. Protect its desirability!”

Whitefish Citizen Survey, respondent comment

Residents of Montana as well as residents of Kalispell and Whitefish are indicating through these surveys that Montana provides amenities they value greatly: open space, low population, and an outdoor environment rich in beauty and places to play. While these are the prized possessions Montana offers, the economy and good paying jobs are also at the top of most lists when asked about their concerns.

Conclusion – Protect the Golden Goose

It is not too late to plan for preserving the reason people live in Montana and visit Montana. But it cannot wait. Comments similar to the ones below need to be repeated by their grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren. The people of Montana and the surrounding communities of the park want to be able to have these sentiments resonate forever.

Couple from Oregon describing Montana:

“I'd say that it's a beautiful state, many many beautiful things to see. The mountains are spectacular. And the open spaces are spectacular too. Varied beauty.” “The open space - I think it helps one to get more in touch with nature because one's focus then is on nature rather than on people...when you're living in the city you're caught up in just getting around and you don't have a chance to really make that connection to nature.” “Glacier NP and the mountains - It's just kind of a spiritual thing, in terms of getting in touch with creation. Because it's so obviously natural creation. Doing that I think you get more in touch with yourself. It makes me feel refreshed.”

2002 Montana's Nonresident Vacationer Experience Study

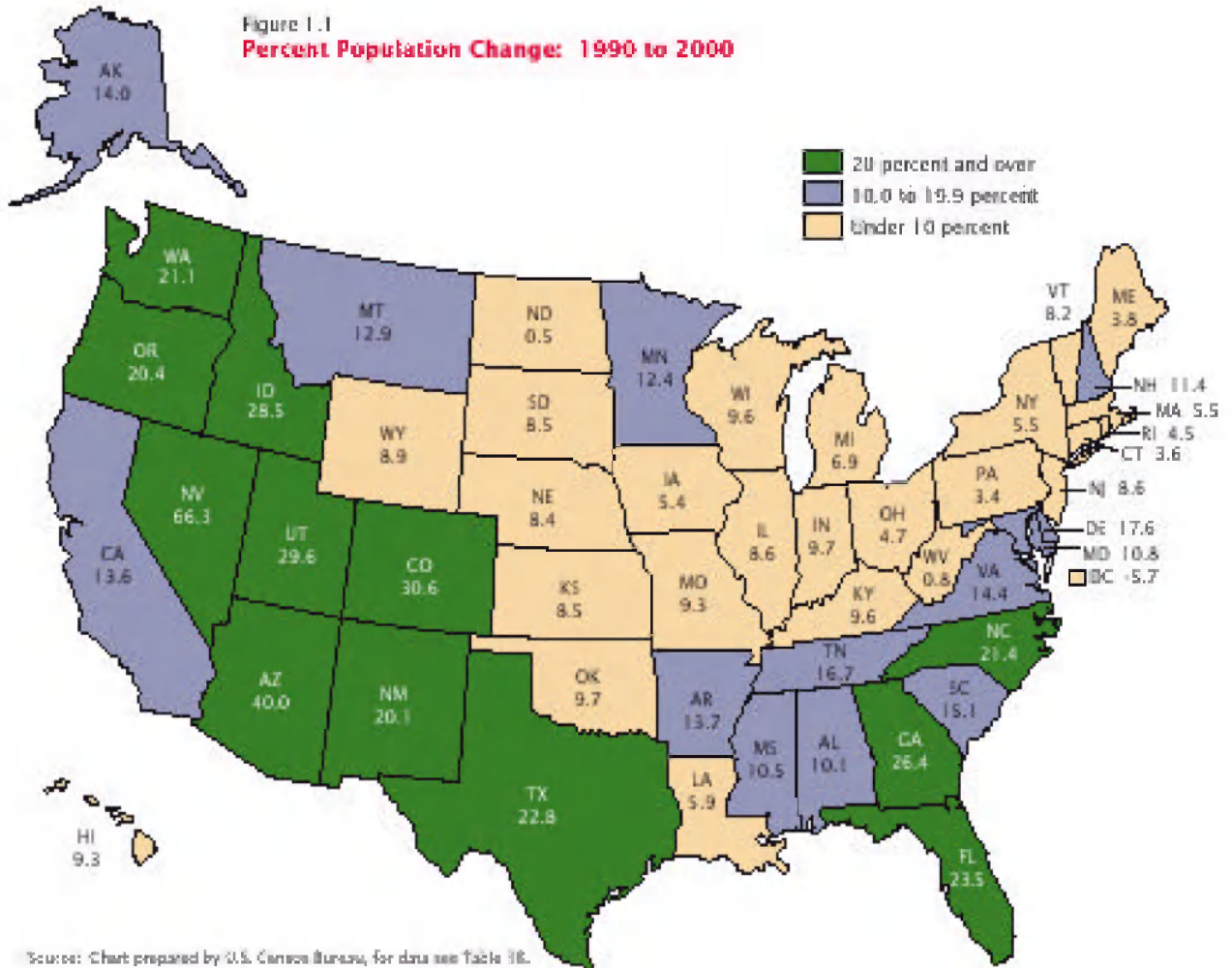
Vacationing family from Minnesota:

“[Compared to other areas where] you just kind of get overwhelmed by ... like Colorado.... It's a theme park. Like Rocky Disneyland or something. And Montana is like Montana. You know, it's a real deal place.”

2002 Montana's Nonresident Vacationer Experience Study

The threat of change to the character of the Flathead is real. In a simple analysis of population trends and where visitors to Montana come from, it is clear that nonresident visitation will continue to grow (Fig. 5). The majority of visitors come from the fastest growing states in the U.S. That simply equates to a growing visitor population. For example, the largest segment of visitors to Glacier and Yellowstone came from California and Washington – two rapidly growing states of 14 percent and 21 percent respectively. Most of these people are living in metropolitan areas. These people are looking for the serenity and beauty they cannot find elsewhere and in most cases, they have struck gold in Montana.

Figure 5: U.S. Population Growth and Nonresident Visitor Residences



Visitors to Glacier National Park-only

- 10% California, Alberta
- 7% Washington, Idaho
- 5% Oregon
- 4% British Columbia, Colorado, Florida, Minnesota
- 3% Missouri, North Dakota, Texas
- 2% Arizona, Iowa, Michigan, Utah, Wyoming

Visitors to Glacier & Yellowstone National Parks

- 13% California
- 8% Florida
- 6% Pennsylvania, Washington
- 5% Colorado, Minnesota
- 4% Georgia, Michigan, Texas, Utah
- 3% Illinois, Louisiana, Oregon, Wisconsin
- 2% Arizona, Idaho, Indiana, Virginia, Alberta

This is an interesting challenge. It can be assumed that our ancestors had these same sentiments and voiced similar opinions about Glacier and its surrounding area. Yet, things have changed in and around Glacier from even 50 years ago. The benchmark used then is different from the benchmark of today. Visitors who remember the area say it has changed and is changing under the auspices of growth and development. They liked it the way it was. However first-time visitors of today only know what they see in front of them. They LOVE the park and most LOVE the area. Their benchmark is *now*. Perhaps the biggest challenge is mankind's ability to adapt and accept. This can be a good thing, but can also allow the changes we'd rather not see. For example, in a Glacier Visitor study conducted in 1996 (Miller, Freimund, & McCool 1997), the researchers found little support by visitors for park management to implement use limits to bring encounters (with other visitors) to preferable or acceptable levels. They also found that when conditions were inconsistent with what was desired, visitors were most likely to rationalize the conditions and enjoy the experience anyway. The point? Using satisfaction levels as the indicator will not tell us anything. People are adaptable and will either say they are satisfied or they will simply move on and seek their experiences elsewhere.

In addition, changes will always occur – that is natural. However, both the residents and the visitors have shared a value with us through these studies: open space, small town character, beautiful scenery, and the presence of predators to guarantee a healthy ecosystem. These are important values and should always be in the forefront of any development opportunities. In other words, a few basic questions need to be asked when development or changes in the environment are being considered:

1. Will this [development] change my feeling of open space? If so, is it acceptable? If not, how can this [development] be modified so as to not infringe on my values?
2. Will this [development] change my feeling of the natural beauty of the area? If so, is it acceptable? If not, how can this [development] be modified so as to not infringe on my values?
3. Will this [development] change my feeling of the character of my community? If so, is it acceptable? If not, how can this [development] be modified so as to not infringe on my values?
4. How much will this development change the character of the ecosystem? Is this change acceptable?

These are but a few suggestions. It does seem imperative, however, for the people of Montana to try maintain their open space, natural beauty, and character of their communities. The economy of the state and individual communities depends on it. The health of the ecosystem depends on it. Glacier is one area in the state of Montana that holds promise and beauty. Glacier National Park is an integral piece of the local value system, the local economy, and the local way of life.

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Appendix A: Summaries of Literature or Related Literature

Glacier National Park Visitor Studies

Littlejohn, M. (1991). *Visitor Services Project – Glacier National Park*. Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Report 35, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID.

- Data collected July 29-Aug. 4, 1990.
- 59% were visiting Glacier for the first time
- 80% went to Logan Pass
- 43% had two people/group, 20% had four people/group
- 13% from MT, 12% Canada, 8% WA, 6% MN and CA.
- 49% said GNP was their primary destination
- 97% sightseeing, 89% wildlife viewing, 72% visited visitor centers/museums.
- Primary reason for 65% for visiting GNP was to view wildlife/scenery.
- \$253/group spent in the Glacier area per trip.

Miller, T.A., & McCool, S.F. (1994). *Glacier National Park Visitor Study*. Research Report 36, Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, School of Forestry, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

- 60% were first time visitors in the summer. Of repeat visitors, 27% had been to the park one other time, 38% had been there 2-5 times, 13% had been there 6-10 times, and 23% had been there 11 or more times.
- 83% of summer visitors went to Logan Pass.
- Length of stay for summer visitors was 4 nights.
- Summer visitors enter and re-enter the park 4.6 times during their stay.
- 2.7 people per group in summer.
- 11% from Montana, 9% from California, 8% from Washington, 7% from Canada, 1% from Idaho
- Reasons for summer visitors to visit GNP include 96% who said enjoying natural scenery, 81% viewing wildlife, 71% doing things with family and friends, 70% learning and discovery, 65% change of daily routine, 60% rest and relaxation.
- In an open-ended question, 45% of summer visitors said the most satisfying part of their visit was the scenery (this aspect had the highest number of responses).
- Percent of respondents who said they were satisfied or very satisfied with the Park's performance on preserving the scenic views and the natural ecosystem were 93% and 89% respectively – which were the highest satisfaction levels of all items. The remaining items were all related to providing services or facilities.

Peccia, R. (1997). *Vehicle Movement and Traffic Study: Glacier National Park*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver, CO.

- Survey conducted August 14-17, 1997
- Average length of stay-- 3.2 days for nonresidents, 1.6 days for local Montanans.
- 19.5% were from Montana, 12% from Canada (80.5% are nonresidents of MT).
- 66% stopped at Logan Pass, 82% drove over Logan Pass

- 43% stayed overnight in the park suggesting 57% stayed overnight at a location outside the park in the immediate area.

Miller, T.A., Freimund, W.A., & McCool, S.F. (1997). *Glacier National Park 1996 Visitor Study*, School of Forestry, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

- There is not a “typical” visitor. Respondents reported six major reasons for visiting the Park: nature appreciation, solitude, introspection, a safe experience, wildlife appreciation, and being in control. Nature appreciation was the most important reason.
- There was little support by visitors for Park management to implement use limits to bring encounters (with other visitors) to preferable or acceptable levels.
- When conditions are inconsistent with what is desired, respondents are most likely to rationalize the conditions and enjoy the experience anyway.

Nickerson, N.P., & Nickerson, R.E. (1998). *Economic Impacts of Going-to-the-Sun Road Reconstruction: Montana and “Glacier Area” Impacts*. Technical Completion Report 98-5, Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, School of Forestry, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

- In 1997, nonresident GNP visitors spent \$206 per visitor per trip or \$566.50 per group per trip in the state of Montana.
- Average length of stay for nonresidents in MT who went to GNP was 5.1 days in the summer of 1996.

Visitor Survey Card. (1999). *Glacier NP 1999 Visitor Survey Card Data Report*, University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Moscow, ID.

- 100% of respondents were satisfied with their sightseeing experience in Glacier.
- 95% of respondents were satisfied with the outdoor recreation experience in Glacier.
- 87% were satisfied with their learning about nature, history, or culture in Glacier.

Visitor Survey Card. (2000). *National Park System 2000 Visitor Survey Card Data Report*, University of Idaho Cooperative Park Studies Unit, Moscow, ID.

- 93% of respondents were satisfied with their sightseeing experience in the National Parks.
- 88% of respondents were satisfied with the outdoor recreation experience in the National Parks.
- 92% were satisfied with their learning about nature, history, or culture in the National Parks.

Going-to-Sun-Road Socio-Economic Report. (2000).

- 76% of the summer respondents went to Logan pass (down from 80% in 1991 and 83% in 1993).
- The primary reason for visiting the Park was to view scenery for 63% of the summer visitors followed by 16% who said to participate in recreation such as hiking, biking, boating, camping, etc.
- 44% were in Glacier for the first time (down from 59% in 1991 and 1993). This study was conducted the last week of August when “vacationers” with families have to be back home. This may explain the decrease in first time visitors.

- 16% said they would not visit Glacier again in the next 3 years, 45% said they would and 39% did not know.
- 23% of Glacier visitors also planned to visit Yellowstone

Giordano, R.N. (2002). *Exploring Visitor Experiences on Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park*, Unpublished Masters' Thesis, School of Forestry, The University of Montana.

- The general reasons given for coming to GNP include the beauty, scenery, wildlife, open views, wildflowers and the thrill of being in a spectacular, natural setting.
- The nature of the experience had two main components – trying to soak in the scenery and being adversely affected by traffic congestion.
- “(This is) probably the most beautiful, one of the most beautiful places in America, and my body, my brain, and my spirit just feel better at 6600 feet.”
- “All this beauty – I mean it’s a really unique part of the world. Done a lot of travel to 70-80 countries and this is really unique terrain. The mountains are just gorgeous, I don’t think you can find shapes like this.”

Van Ormer, C. (2002). *A Differential study of Backcountry Day Users and Backcountry Overnight users Attitudes, Motivations, and Behaviors Towards Grizzly Bears in Glacier National Park*. Unpublished Masters thesis, College of Graduate Studies, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID.

- Overnight and day hikers were surveyed summer of 2000.
- Overnight users showed a stronger association of attitudes towards the ecologicistic and naturalistic scales.
- Even though day users and overnight users participate in different activities within the backcountry, their behaviors and attitudes are essentially the same.

Nonresidents to Montana and image about Montana

Nickerson, N. (2002). *The Montana Nonresident Visitor: A Comparison of Glacier, Yellowstone, and Non-Park Visitors*. Research Report 2002-10, Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, School of Forestry, The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

Visitors to Glacier:

- These visitors spent 6.12 nights in Montana on average and only 3 percent were on a day trip in Montana.
- Seventy-one percent of overnights were spent in Glacier Country Travel Region.
- Ten percent each were from Alberta and California, 7% each from Washington and Idaho, 5% from Oregon, 4% each from British Columbia, Colorado, Florida, and Minnesota. Forty-three percent came from the western states/provinces of Alberta, California, Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and British Columbia.
- Eighty-two percent had visited Montana before and 12 percent had lived in Montana.
- Forty-four percent traveled as couples, and 30 percent traveled as a family group but only 21 percent of them had children under 18 on the trip.
- Vacation was the purpose for being in Montana for 88 percent of these visitors.
- Twenty-three percent flew on a portion of their trip and 16 percent of those people rented cars, mostly in Montana or Washington.

- Nine percent hired an outfitter while in Montana.
- Visitors were attracted to Montana for Glacier National Park (77%), mountains/forests (61%), rivers/lakes (40%), open space/uncrowded areas (38%), hiking (29%), and wildlife (25%).
- Forty-four percent used the Internet for Montana travel information followed by 28 percent who used an auto club.
- The information center person was the most useful information sources used while in Montana (37%) followed by highway signs, brochure rack, and service personnel (20% each).
- Glacier National Park visitors also visited Flathead Lake (49%), Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center (10%), National Bison Range (9%), and Little Bighorn Battlefield (8%).
- At least one-fifth of nonresident summer visitors who visited Glacier went picnicking, camping, day hiking, wildlife watching, shopping, and visited Montana historical sites and museums.
- Visitors were most satisfied with the hospitality and service in Montana and expressed the most dissatisfaction with the availability of rest areas.
- Conditions viewed as improving the most over time by visitors were the availability of commercial lodging (53%), recreation opportunities (45%), and road conditions (44%).
- Conditions that some viewed as worsening over time included amount of open space (21%), amount of wildlife viewing (12%), and condition of the natural environment (11%).

Montana Department of Commerce 2001 Internet Conversion Research Report (2002). Indiana Department of Tourism.

- In ranking the top five out of 24 activities or phrases that come to mind when describing a Montana vacation, 21% ranked natural beauty as their top image while another 49% ranked it in their top 2-5 image. (70% in top 5).
- 15% ranked mountains as the top image while another 43% ranked mountains in the top 2-5 (58% in top 5).
- 15% ranked visit national parks/site as the top image followed by another 40% who ranked it as their top 2-5 (55% in top 5).

Yuan, M., Moisey, N., & McCool, S. (1991). 1990 Non-resident Travel to Montana: An Economic Report Revised Estimates. Research Report 15, Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

- In 1990 – 11% from WY, 10% from WA, 9% from CA, 7% ID, 5% ND, 4% ID, 3% MN.

Montana Residents

Whitefish Citizen Survey. (2001). The Hingston Roach Group, Inc.

- Most desirable aspect of living in Whitefish; 54% cited small town size/atmosphere, strong sense of community, friendly people; 18% cited opportunities for recreation, access to the outdoors; 17% value area's scenic beauty, natural setting and location of town.
- Maintain the character of Whitefish and protect the environment received the highest rating of issues for the future of Whitefish.

Montana Conservation Voters Education Fund (2002), Public Opinion Research; Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates, Santa Monica, CA.

- 600 registered voters in Montana telephone survey March 3-5, 2002.
- In an open-ended question, “Generally speaking, what do you like best about living in Montana? 39% not overpopulation/wide open spaces, 25% natural surroundings/scenery, 9% the people, 7% quality of life/low crime rate, 5% born and raised here/lived here my whole life/it’s my home.
- Question: “We can have a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time without having to choose one over the other”: 71% said this in 2000 and increased to 78% in 2002. Only 24% in 2000 and 20% in 2002 agreed with “sometimes a clean environment and a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.
- Degree of agreement/disagreement of values people associate with Montana: 80% strongly agree and 18% somewhat agree that a value is “enjoying outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, and skiing; 56% strongly agree and 31% somewhat agree that protecting Montana’s wild lands and forests.

Dillon, T., Praytor, H.C. Exploring Tourism Development Potential: Resident Attitudes in Kalispell, MT CTAP 2001-2002. Research Report 2002-6, Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, the University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

Nonresident Visitors (1996 Survey Data):

- In 2001, over 3.9 million travel groups visited Montana. Of those, approximately 511,000 (13%) passed through Kalispell.
- Close to \$1.75 billion was spent statewide in 2001 by nonresident travelers. This figure amounts to approximately \$1,935 for every Montana resident.
- In Kalispell, nonresident visitors spent over \$74 million, or about \$5,212 per county resident.
- Travelers to Flathead County stayed in the state twice as long as statewide visitors.
- Flathead County visitors traveled mainly as couples, but also as families.
- Overnight visitors to Flathead County were more likely than statewide visitors to stay in campgrounds (public or private), but about equally likely to stay at a hotel or motel.
- Seventy-six percent of overnight visitors to Flathead County were in Montana primarily for vacation, while 12 percent were in the state primarily to visit friends and relatives.
- Vacationers in Flathead County were attracted to Montana primarily because of Glacier National Park.
- Wildlife watching was the most popular activity for overnight visitors to Flathead County, followed by nature photography and day hiking.
- Visitors to Flathead County spent the largest portion of their money at retail stores and in restaurants/bars.

Resident Characteristics and Attitudes about Tourism (2001 Survey Data):

- Respondents from Kalispell have resided in their community and in the state for about the same length of time as the statewide sample.

- Montana natives comprised over half of the Kalispell sample.
- The largest portion of Kalispell respondents earn their household income in the education and service sectors.
- The majority of Kalispell respondents feel tourism should have a role equal to other industries in the local economy, and ranked the tourism and recreation industry 6th on a list of desired economic development options.
- Most Kalispell respondents work in places that supply little or none of their products or services to tourists or tourist businesses.
- One-fourth of Kalispell respondents have frequent contact with tourists, and over half of respondents enjoy interacting with tourists.
- Kalispell respondents have a stronger attachment to their community than do statewide respondents. Both groups are somewhat concerned about the future of their communities.
- Ninety-eight percent of Kalispell respondents feel that the population in the area is increasing, and of those, the majority feels it is increasing too fast.
- Kalispell respondents feel improving the condition of job opportunities, as well as road conditions, cost of living, and traffic congestion can enhance their quality of life.
- The respondents of Kalispell are somewhat supportive of tourism development, although to a lesser degree than the statewide sample.
- Respondents feel strongly that any decision about tourism development should involve local residents and not be left entirely to the private sector.
- Overall economic benefit is perceived as the primary advantage of increased tourism in Kalispell, while increased traffic and crowding are seen as the leading disadvantages.

Concerns of Kalispell Residents:

- Kalispell respondents value the town's friendly small-town atmosphere and would like to see this characteristic continued into the future.
- Kalispell respondents dislike the current retail growth plan, as well as an observed increase in gambling, drug use and crime, and the current rate of population growth.
- Respondents feel industry/business is missing from the area and desire a proper growth plan.
- When prompted for ideas for a new image for Kalispell, the largest portion of respondents suggested emphasizing the safe and family-friendly aspects of their small community.
- Flathead Lake and the Big Mountain are the top two spots where residents take their visitors.
- If new attractions were to be developed in Kalispell, respondents suggest a cultural/civic center, a downtown city park and a sports arena with associated sports teams.
- When asked to rank a list of issues important to the future of Kalispell, maintaining the existing character of the town was rated as the most important.
- Glacier National Park, the Conrad Mansion, Flathead Lake and golfing are all attractions that Kalispell respondents suggest promoting.
- Casinos, chain stores and bars are features respondents feel should not be promoted in Kalispell.
- As a marketing strategy for Kalispell, some suggest advertising more while others want to emphasize the character and beauty of the surrounding natural resources.