PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT RESULTS
October 2019
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the summer of 2019, the Montana Outdoor Heritage Project (MOHP) launched a massive statewide public outreach effort asking Montana residents how the state might better approach protecting its outdoor heritage.

Participants were asked to complete an online survey and join community conversations held across the state. MOHP made every effort to ensure geographic, racial and ethnic, and political diversity in our outreach, however, these results do favor participation from respondents in easier-to-access areas.

Survey results and community conversations reveal that Montana's outdoor heritage is a widely shared value that connects state residents, regardless of background. Montanans are motivated to conserve our outdoor way of life due to perceptions that the state is growing and changing too quickly. When it comes to priorities, protecting fish and wildlife habitat and access to public lands are at the top of the list.

Participants most consistently identified new conservation funding as the primary means to address growth and other challenges. The vast majority of survey respondents — a whopping 83 percent — believe that Montana should dedicate additional funding to protect our wildlife, working lands and outdoor recreation opportunities, even if it means increasing some state taxes.

Through open-ended questions and discussions, participants expressed a preference to pursue new revenue sources that increase contributions for out-of-state visitors and some outdoor users who don’t contribute through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses.

The results of this extensive outreach demonstrate a strong appetite in Montana to advance new policies to create dedicated funding for private and public lands conservation, wildlife management, and outdoor access and recreation.
4 MONTHS
of community outreach between May 2 and September 23, 2019.

1%
of the Montana population participated.

11,166
unique survey responses from more than 250 Montana zip codes.

50
community meetings facilitated from Troy to Ekalaka with participation from roughly 500 residents.

15,000
doors knocked by volunteers and staff of supportive organizations.
CONVERSATION TOPIC: What does Montana’s Outdoor Heritage mean to you?

In community after community, Montana’s outdoor heritage was described as a value that connects us all, regardless of where we live, how much money we have, or whether we hunt, hike, harvest, or work in the outdoors. Montanans have a profound respect for the land and our connections to it.

Particularly in rural communities, participants talked about being able to access land, pass on traditions, and maintain livelihoods. Outdoor heritage was defined as working hard, lending a helping hand to a neighbor, and passing our Montana way of life to our children.

In more urban communities, participants discussed the value of outdoor recreation with family and friends, and felt a shared responsibility to take care of Montana’s land and water resources for future generations.

Regardless of location, the vast majority of conversations involved a discussion of the importance of access. Public lands and waters are seen as a shared public asset that should be available to every Montanan, regardless of income or background.

“Access and the ability to experience the outdoors. To take care of yourself and your neighbor by working hard, and to pass on a life that’s better for your family.”
(Troy, MT)

“Being able to continue raising the next generation on my ranch. Having continued and better public access so everyone can enjoy the outdoors. Seeing wildlife continue to flourish. Seeing rural communities and families remain on the land.”
(Choteau, MT)
IDENTIFYING VALUES

**SURVEY QUESTION:** When you think of Montana’s outdoor heritage, what is the first thing that comes to mind?

Survey results reveal several themes that unite Montanans in their shared connection to Montana’s outdoor heritage.

Survey respondents share an overwhelming love and respect for the physical attributes of Montana’s land and water. “Open,” “vast,” “expansive,” and “beautiful” were some of the most commonly used words to describe Montana’s outdoor heritage. Respondents also shared a common connection to the abundant outdoor activities in the state, citing hunting and fishing as the most popular activities.

Other themes uniting Montanans include a recognition of the value of public lands and particularly, public access; the need to protect undeveloped lands; and the importance of maintaining working landscapes and agricultural production.
IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES & NEEDS

CONVERSATION TOPIC: What challenges do you see to our outdoor way of life?

Growth and Change
Regardless of location, the single most pervasive challenge mentioned in communities is a concern about the pace of growth, and its effects on Montana.

In rural areas, participants are concerned about large tracts of land bought by outside interests with little or no connection to the community. Participants frequently said newcomers and absentee landowners typically don’t respect traditional Montana values like providing access or taking care of neighbors.

In more rapidly growing communities, concerns ranged from expanding recreational use and development having adverse effects on wildlife habitat to increased user conflicts.

Gateway communities near national parks frequently focused on the challenges of being overrun with visitors. Other parts of the state, particularly in eastern Montana, participants expressed a desire for increased visitation. Crumbling infrastructure was a recurrent theme, particularly trail networks, campgrounds, and state parks.

“People are coming in and purchasing and privatizing land, creating an influx in property value and making the land less accessible to the locals. We need to keep public lands public and accessible.” (Lewistown, MT)

“Glacier is being overrun, and there’s no cohesive strategy to spread out the visitors. We’re not keeping pace with demand and growth. Flathead Lake is being overrun, and there are overcrowding issues with campsites everywhere.” (Columbia Falls, MT)

“The Miles City Economic Development Committee found the #1 priority needed to get families to move to Miles City is parks and outdoor recreation.” (Miles City, MT)
SURVEY QUESTION: In your opinion, what are the TOP THREE most pressing challenges facing Montana’s outdoor heritage?

Survey participants say loss of public access, climate change, and pollution of lakes, rivers, and streams are the top three most important challenges facing Montana’s outdoors.

- Loss of access to public lands
- Climate change
- Pollution of lakes, rivers, and streams
- Loss of critical wildlife habitat like winter range
- Protecting places to hunt and fish
- Controlling invasive species like knapweed or zebra mussels
- Impacts of wildfire
- Overcrowded trailheads, boat launches, and campgrounds
- Loss of working farms and ranches
- Loss of outdoor heritage and traditions

SURVEY QUESTION: Recognizing that there frequently is not enough funding for all of these, please indicate how important it is to you a certain priority be funded.

Survey respondents were asked to categorize a list of 10 funding priorities as either very important, somewhat important, or not important. Protecting wildlife habitat is the most important category.
**CONVERSATION TOPIC:** What ideas do you have for protecting or caring for our outdoor way of life?

Montanans across the state offered a wide variety of potential solutions to help protect Montana’s wildlife, working lands, and outdoor recreation. While answers were diverse, several areas of common ground emerged from the community conversations.

**Find New Funding Sources**
Boosting dedicated conservation funding was by far the most frequently identified solution. In addition to fully funding existing pots, residents identified several new opportunities for the state, such as increasing or broadening user fees and license programs, creating a sales tax on outdoor goods, and tightening loopholes on Recreational Vehicle registration.

“More coordination between all the various user groups and managing agencies. There’s no one umbrella group that’s keeping tabs on everything and coordinating all the various entities to work together.”
(Kalispell, MT)

**Create More Partnerships**
Collaboration, working together across political and geographic divides, and engaging more citizens through volunteerism, private fundraising, and public-private partnerships were also common themes.

**Empower Local Communities**
Montanans expressed a desire to be more in control of funding. They want to be able to use and direct new funding locally and ensure it will be used to assist their own communities.

“We need to educate our tourists to protect the outdoors through social media, tv, radio, PSA’s, and educate our children on the outdoors.”
(Columbia Falls, MT)

**Provide More Education**
Lastly, Montanans believe in the power of education to resolve conflicts. Ideas included creating a required class for outdoor recreation, similar to the safety course that youth are required to take for their hunting license. Others urged building outdoor education into the public school curriculum and funding youth groups like the Montana Conservation Corps. Education for newcomers, among user groups, and particularly, more outdoor education for youth, were recurring themes across the state.
SUPPORT FOR DEDICATED FUNDING

**SURVEY QUESTION:** Other states have increased the amount of dedicated funding to better address these priorities. Would you support or oppose increased funding in Montana for this purpose?

Montana residents across the state consistently identified dedicated conservation funding as a primary solution to address new growth and other challenges to Montana’s land, water, and wildlife.

The survey confirmed overwhelming support for this solution. Nine of every ten survey respondents were in favor of increasing dedicated funding in Montana. Eight out of every ten survey respondents supported increasing dedicated funding even if it means increasing some state taxes.

**SURVEY QUESTION:** Would you support or oppose increased funding if it was funded by a modest increase in state taxes?

“We need funding for our future so we can prepare for these changes.” (Paradise Valley, MT)
SURVEY QUESTION: What are some options Montana could consider to increase dedicated funding to protect our outdoor heritage?

While new dedicated funding is a popular idea, several important considerations influence how Montanans think about shaping any new investment opportunities.

Avoid New Financial Burdens on Residents
Survey participants expressed some caution about creating new financial burdens on all state residents. Instead, survey participants found more agreement that nonresidents should be asked to contribute a higher share. Common suggestions include providing gateway communities sales-tax options and creating higher fees for out-of-state second homeowners or vacation home users.

Distribute Load Among Outdoor Users
Another popular theme emerged from Montana’s hunting and fishing community, who felt they were shouldering an unequal share of costs for protecting land and wildlife through the purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. The three most commonly cited solutions to more equally distribute this load among other outdoor users include:

1. Sales tax on outdoor recreation gear
2. Creating new user fees or licenses for non-hunting/non-fishing outdoor activities
3. Expanding the scope of motorized and vehicle registration fees

“For the most part, Montanans foot the bill for the millions that visit our state each year and shifting some of that burden would help.” (Havre, MT)
The Montana Outdoor Heritage Project spent four months listening to what Montanans value and how they would shape solutions to protect Montana’s great outdoors. Our two top takeaways?

1. Montanans see a great need for new revenue sources for our land, water, and wildlife.
2. There are several zones of agreement for policy mechanisms that could create more dedicated funding.

The Montana Outdoor Heritage Project will spend the next several months sharing these results with interested citizens, community leaders and decision makers.

We plan to engage our decision-makers in a process and investigate some of the solutions that have the most support and potential to advance statewide conservation funding.

ABOUT THE MONTANA OUTDOOR HERITAGE PROJECT

The Montana Outdoor Heritage Project (MOHP) is a collaboration of Montana citizens and landowners, small businesses, conservation and recreation groups, and local communities interested in conserving, maintaining, and investing in our water, wildlife, working lands, and outdoor way of life. MOHP was formed to give Montanans an opportunity to engage in conversations about what the outdoors means to each of us, find common ground, share concerns, and identify Montana-made solutions to pass this outdoor heritage on to our kids. Learn more at www.montanaheritageproject.com.
Thank you.

Photos courtesy of: Lynn Donaldson, Montana State Parks and Erik Petersen Photography