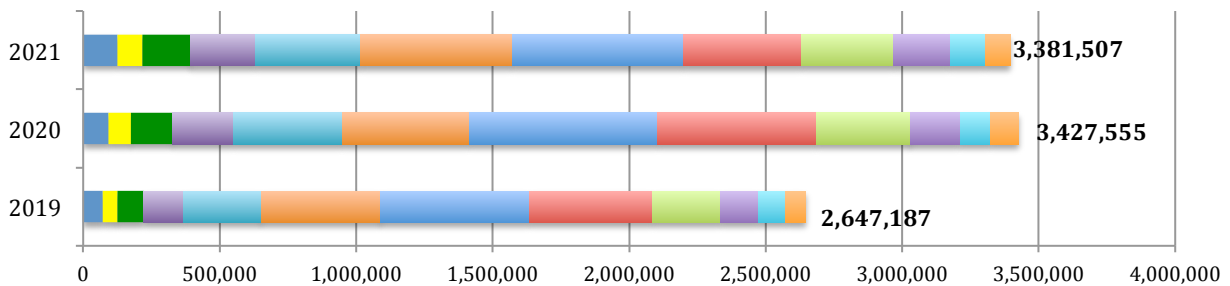




2021 Montana State Parks Annual Visitation Report

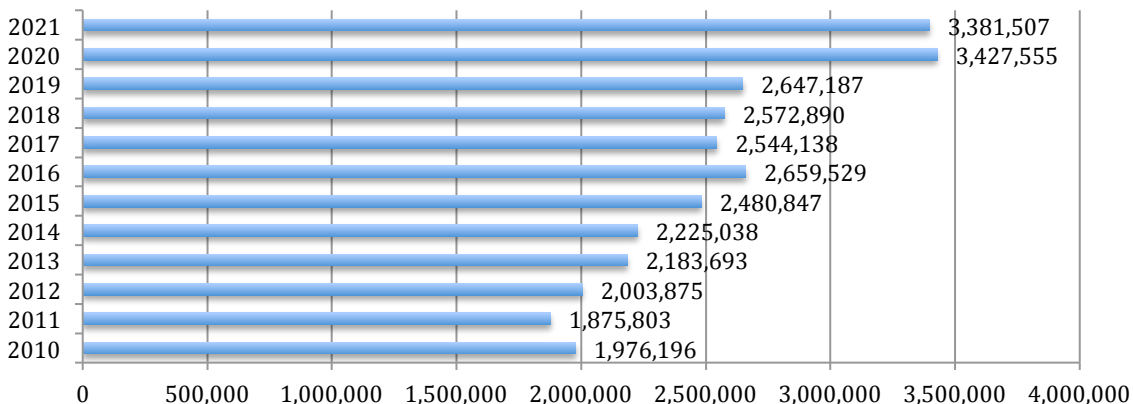
Issued February 11, 2022

The Montana State Parks system welcomed nearly **3.4 million** visitors in 2021, falling just **1.3%** short of matching its all time high set last year. Through July, the system's visitation grew at a record setting pace in 2021, however ensuing months of intense smoke, drought conditions, and then cold winter temperatures softened visitation across the state. While this represents a slight decrease below 2020's estimates, it is a notable **27.7%** increase over 2019 figures as well as past years.



Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.
2019	72,608	53,884	94,648	146,589	284,340	437,261	545,156
2020	92,121	83,506	151,979	224,062	396,508	465,567	691,549
2021	124,361	91,749	175,726	235,605	383,052	553,824	626,315
	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total Visitation	
2019	452,339	248,866	138,170	99,648	73,678	2,647,187	
2020	582,160	342,403	182,221	112,466	103,013	3,427,555	
2021	428,996	335,084	207,789	127,324	91,682	3,381,507	

The graph below presents a historical look at how visitation for the state park system has changed since 2010. Since then, overall state park visitation has grown by **71.1%**, or over **1.4 million** visitors. By comparison, Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park's visitation has increased by **33.5%** and **40.1%** during the same period of time, respectively.



In 2021, there were **11** parks whose visitation exceeded 100,000, whereas in 2020 there were **eight**, and in 2019 just **seven**. A full list of state parks and their visitation estimates for 2019-21 can be viewed on page four of this report.

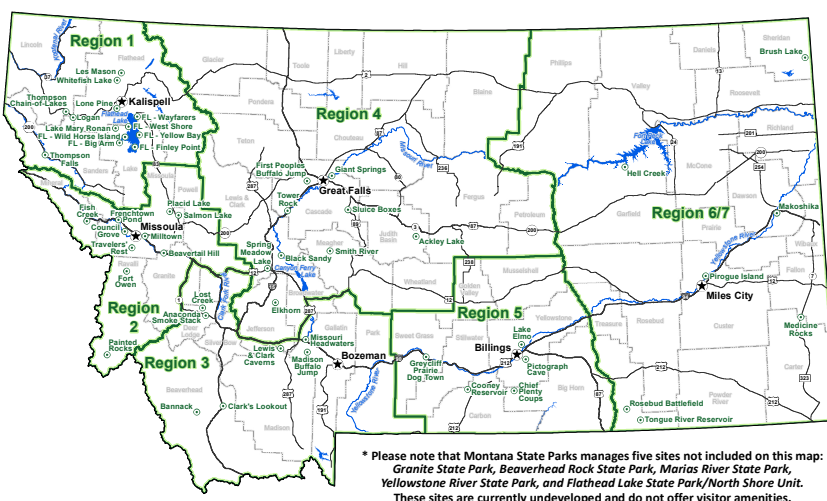
State Park Region	State Park (City/Town)	Total 2021 Visitation
4	Giant Springs (Great Falls)	414,889
1	Flathead Lake-all units (Kalispell)	339,631
5	Cooney Reservoir (Roberts)	263,691
4	Spring Meadow (Helena)	254,141
5	Lake Elmo (Billings)	212,916
6/7	Makoshika (Glendive)	150,484
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns (Three Forks)	145,637
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes (Libby)	140,659
1	Lone Pine (Kalispell)	128,640
2	Milltown (Bonner)	110,732
1	Whitefish Lake (Whitefish)	105,648

Introduction

This report has been developed utilizing 2019-2021 visitation estimates reported by state park managers. Visitation is a term used to describe the number of individuals visiting a state park. The system's visitation methodology and reporting practice did not substantially change during this time. However, staff members are continually examining ways to improve accuracy. Please see the reporting notes at the end of this summary for further clarification on such efforts, as well as some clarifying points on factors impacting visitation.ⁱ

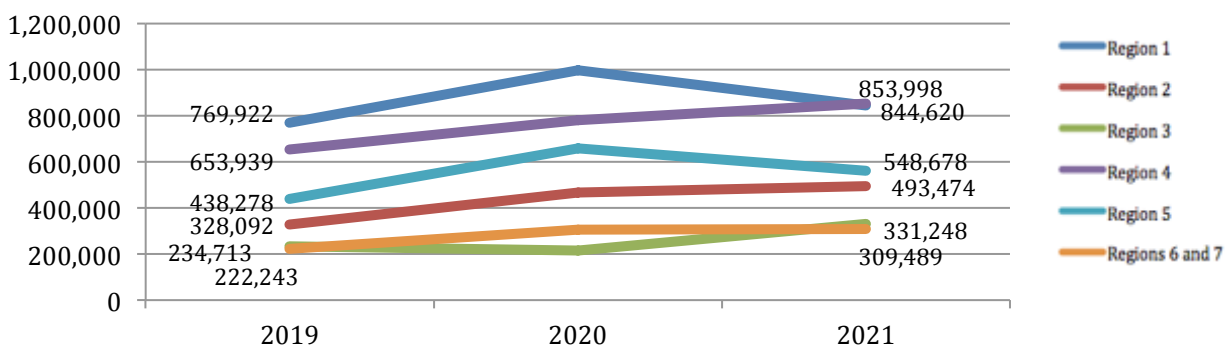
A region-by-region glimpse

The Montana State Parks system is sub-divided into six administrative regions with regional headquarter offices located in Kalispell (1), Missoula (2), Bozeman (3), Great Falls (4), Billings (5), and Miles City (6/7). An interesting way to look at visitation data is to see what has happened across each state park administrative region.



In 2021, Regions 1 and 4 cumulatively accounted for just over half of the state's overall visitation although a look back to 2019 and 2020 indicates that this share has been on a slight decline. Regions 2 and 6/7, meanwhile, have been growing over the past few years, while Region 5 grew

between 2019 and 2020 but then returned to its 2019 level in 2021. By contrast, visitation in Region 3 declined between 2019 and 2020 and then grew quickly in 2021.



Total visitation (2019-21) and proportions of statewide totals

	2019	% Of 2019 total	2020	% Of 2020 total	2021	% Of 2021 total
Region 1	769,922	29.1%	997,581	29.1%	844,620	25.0%
Region 2	328,092	12.4%	467,906	13.7%	493,474	14.6%
Region 3	234,713	8.9%	215,287	6.3%	331,248	9.8%
Region 4	653,939	24.7%	780,899	22.8%	853,998	25.3%
Region 5	438,278	16.6%	659,559	19.2%	548,678	16.2%
Region 6/7	222,243	8.4%	306,274	8.9%	309,489	9.2%
	2,647,187		3,427,555		3,381,507	

The chart below offers some further comparisons. Between 2019 and 2021 nearly all regions experienced double-digit growth with Region 2 notably growing by over **50%**; Regions 3 and 6/7 by over **39%**; and, Regions 4 and 5 by over **30%** and **25%**, respectively. A potential takeaway is that indeed some impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic are at play; however, even before that numbers were on the rise. A look back at historical data for the system illustrates this. This data corroborates anecdotal evidence of the overall growth of outdoor recreation participation and use of public lands in Montana as well as recent surveys that have been undertaken from a number of industry perspectives.

Region	2021 comparison with 2019		2021 comparison with 2020	
	# Visits	% Change	# Visits	% Change
Region 1	+74,698	+9.7%	-152,961	-15.3%
Region 2	+165,382	+50.4%	+25,568	+5.5%
Region 3	+96,535	+41.1%	+115,961	+53.9%
Region 4	+200,059	+30.6%	+73,099	+9.4%
Region 5	+110,400	+25.2%	-110,881	-16.8%
Regions 6/7	+87,246	+39.3%	+3,215	+1.0%
TOTAL	+734,320 est. visits (+27.7%)		-45,999 est. visits (-1.3%)	

In comparing 2021 with last year, Region 3's growth appears to be significant, however it stands to mention that this was attributable in part to the re-launch of cave tours at Lewis & Clark Caverns, which were suspended in 2020. During this same time period, the declines in Regions 1 and 5 of over **15%** are rather striking. One factor could be the explosive growth that occurred between 2019 and 2020 for these regions as the public pursued camping and water-based recreation, both of which Region 1 offers at many of its parks, as does Region 5 at Cooney Reservoir. Another consideration is the impact of smoke, drought conditions, and inclement weather that limits these kinds of opportunities and the public's propensity to be outdoors.

Statewide Visitation Estimates (2019-21)

Visitation at state parks increased for **21** state parks in 2021 compared with last year, and since 2019 it has increased at **35** state parks. Between 2019 and 2020 visitation increased for **36** state parks. In examining this time period, it is clear that many parks experienced explosive growth during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, even with the absence or sharp decline in school field trips and other group activities that could not take place. Second, this growth, albeit not as brisk or widespread as in 2020, continued even further for **14** state parks. The table below provides annual estimates between for all parks in order of descending 2021 values.

RE-GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change (2020 and 2021)	% Change (2019 and 2021)
4	Giant Springs	384,023	384,309	414,889	+8.0%	+8.0%
1	Flathead Lake (all units)	354,826	471,709	339,631	-28.0%	-4.3%
5	Cooney Reservoir	175,870	359,607	263,691	-26.7%	+49.9%
4	Spring Meadow	134,992	178,156	254,141	+42.7%	+88.3%
5	Lake Elmo	182,022	231,388	212,916	-8.0%	+17.0%
6/7	Makoshika	85,272	128,288	150,484	+17.3%	+76.5%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	86,077	40,591	145,637	+258.8%	+69.2%
1	Thompson Chain of Lakes	123,682	169,296	140,659	-16.9%	+13.7%
1	Lone Pine	114,132	129,747	128,640	-0.9%	+12.7%
2	Milltown	36,387	72,433	110,732	+52.9%	+204.3%
1	Whitefish	72,573	86,398	105,648	+22.3%	+45.6%
6/7	Tongue River Reservoir	64,504	92,492	90,859	-1.8%	+40.9%
2	Salmon Lake	50,754	72,709	86,987	+19.6%	+71.4%
3	Missouri Headwaters	51,898	70,917	75,699	+6.7%	+45.9%
2	Travelers' Rest	39,851	49,545	64,933	+31.1%	+62.9%
4	Black Sandy	43,241	69,288	61,518	-11.2%	+42.3%
2	Frenchtown Pond	51,272	83,670	59,240	-29.2%	+15.5%
2	Placid Lake	67,695	90,179	57,752	-36.0%	-14.7%
1	Les Mason	35,898	50,638	51,396	+1.5%	+43.2%
3	Bannack	43,804	38,085	46,583	+22.3%	+6.3%
4	Ackley Lake	32,522	66,480	45,715	-31.2%	+40.6%
5	Pictograph Cave	54,273	42,870	44,569	+4.0%	-17.9%
2	Council Grove	35,868	46,757	43,249	-7.5%	+20.6%
2	Beavertail Hill	22,201	29,104	40,393	+38.8%	+81.9%
1	Lake Mary Ronan	23,086	34,625	31,055	-10.3%	+34.5%
1	Logan	30,050	35,928	30,355	-15.5%	+1.0%
4	Sluice Boxes	22,085	31,847	27,767	-12.8%	+25.7%
4	Tower Rock	14,777	29,172	26,532	-9.0%	+79.5%
2	Painted Rocks	12,987	19,014	25,625	+34.8%	+97.3%
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	15,649	24,715	23,192	-6.2%	+48.2%
6/7	Hell Creek	36,189	34,515	22,349	-35.2%	-38.2%
6/7	Medicine Rocks	16,819	27,527	20,140	-26.8%	+19.7%
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	16,202	15,376	19,286	+25.4%	+19.0%
1	Thompson Falls	15,675	19,240	17,236	-10.4%	+10.0%

RE-GION	PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change (2020 and 2021)	% Change (2019 and 2021)
3	Lost Creek	15,346	18,633	16,992	-8.8%	+10.7%
3	Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,309	16,787	15,796	-5.9%	-3.1%
5	Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	10,206	12,677	14,151	+11.6%	+38.7%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	15,907	13,017	13,352	+2.6%	-16.1%
6/7	Brush Lake	8,556	11,270	12,181	+8.1%	+42.4%
6/7	Pirogue Island	4,340	6,209	8,016	+29.1%	+84.7%
6/7	Rosebud Battlefield	6,563	5,973	5,460	-8.6%	-16.8%
2	Fort Owen	4,796	4,495	4,563	+1.5%	-4.9%
4	Smith River	6,097	6,271	4,150	-33.8%	-31.9%
3	Clark's Lookout	5,630	5,559	3,750	-32.5%	-33.4%
3	Granite Ghost Town	N/A	N/A	3,599	N/A	N/A
2	Fish Creek	6,281	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

SPOTLIGHT: Why is visitation information important?

The COVID-19 health pandemic impacted 2020 visitation across many public lands - in some cases it led to full or temporary closures of facilities, while for others, it led to explosive growth as the public sought a safe space to head outdoors. Public land managers across the country are carefully examining the ramifications of these changes, and are evaluating whether visitation trends have been specific to the pandemic or if there is a 'new normal' being established.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has been contemplating this question for some time given steady growth in park and other site visitation over the past decade and due to the lengthy seasons in which the agency's sites are open and used by visitors. Growth and evolution in the outdoor recreation industry has played a role in parlaying gear and equipment into the marketplace, and thereby converting year-round outdoor participation into a reality for many. This growth has important implications for the "outdoor recreation economy." Montana was first in the nation in 2020 for the percentage that outdoor recreation value added to the state's gross domestic product.¹

Other considerations surrounding growth in visitation include how public land managers can more openly attract and engage individuals of diverse cultural experiences and backgrounds, both as visitors as well as part of the workforce and how to best protect and preserve natural, cultural and recreational resources for the long term. Education of 'new' park visitors has become a critical focus, echoed by the national "Recreate Responsibly" campaign. Meanwhile, infrastructural needs mount, as systems are put to the test, and staff retention and housing challenges are exacerbated.

Montana's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan² offers a framework for examining these issues, as does the application of measured studies and analytical reports that consider visitor use and important recreation management principles. Further evaluation and careful monitoring of visitation trends help to inform key decisions about planning, operations, and upholding stewardship principles.

¹ <https://www.bea.gov/data/special-topics/outdoor-recreation>

² https://files.cfc.umt.edu/humandimensionslab/SCORP_2020-2024.pdf

REGION 1

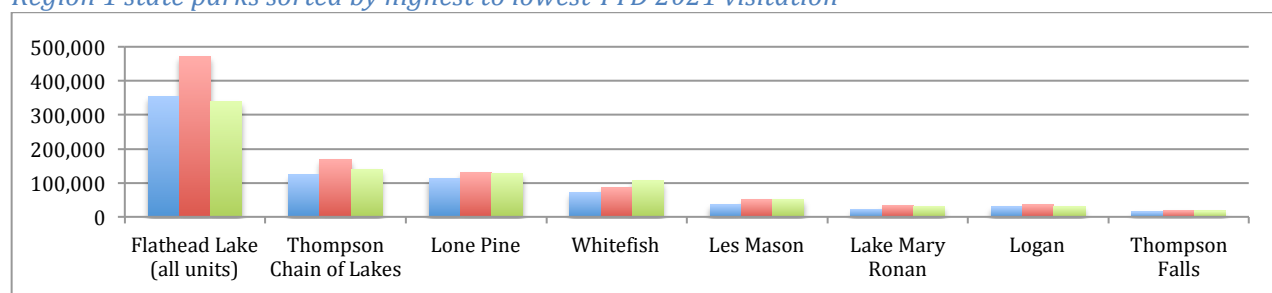
Region 1 served approximately **844,620** visitors in 2021. This represents an estimated **15.3%** decrease compared with last year; however, 2020 was a year of significant growth for the region as the region played host to nearly 1,000,000 visitors for the first time. While the pace of growth softened in 2021, compared with 2019, the region's visitation was still **9.7%** higher. A significant driver of the decline in 2021 was lower visitation at the Wayfarer's Unit of Flathead Lake. There was also a fire in late summer near Finley Point that shuttered two parks temporarily and displaced campers for a few weeks. Visitation for Region 1 represents **24.9%** of the system's total visitation for 2021.

Significantly, of the eleven parks in the state that saw visitation levels exceed 100,000, four are in Region 1 - Flathead Lake, Thompson Chain of Lakes, Lone Pine, and Whitefish. This is a first for Whitefish, which attracts visitors to the shores of Whitefish Lake, as does Les Mason. The important public access these parks provide is underscored by their continued visitation growth year after year, especially as the Whitefish community grows in population.

Interestingly, Flathead Lake, known for its beauty and access to camping and water recreation, welcomed less visitors across its six units in 2021 than in 2020 and 2019, however it still was the second most visited state park this year. In several other cases across the region, state parks experienced much higher visitation than in 2019, but lower than in 2020's record setting year. This is true for Thompson Chain of Lakes, Lone Pine, Lake Mary Ronan, Logan and Thompson Falls.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Region 1 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation

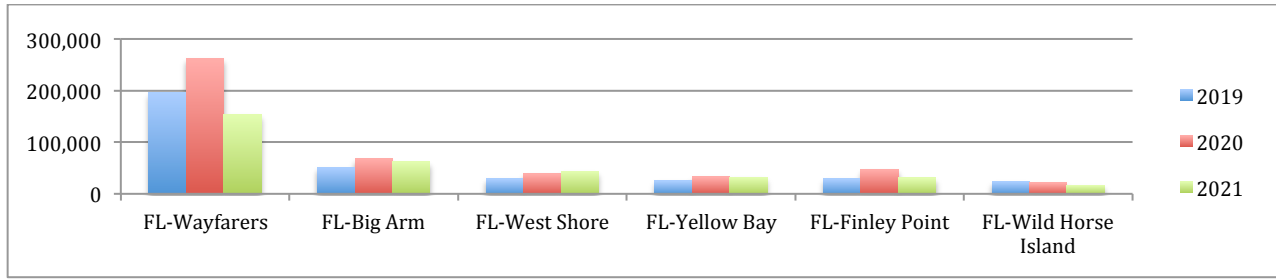


PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Flathead Lake (all units)	354,826	471,709	339,631	-28.0%	-4.3%
Thompson Chain of Lakes	123,682	169,296	140,659	-16.9%	+13.7%
Lone Pine	114,132	129,747	128,640	-0.9%	+12.7%
Whitefish	72,573	86,398	105,648	+22.3%	+45.6%
Les Mason	35,898	50,638	51,396	+1.5%	+43.2%
Lake Mary Ronan	23,086	34,625	31,055	-10.3%	+34.5%
Logan	30,050	35,928	30,355	-15.5%	+1.0%
Thompson Falls	15,675	19,240	17,236	-10.4%	+10.0%
TOTAL	769,922	997,581	844,620	-15.3%	+9.7%

NOTE: Includes Flathead Lake being counted as one park, comprised of six units. Also of note is that the gates at the vehicular entrances of Les Mason and Thompson Falls are seasonally closed during earlier parts of the year - estimates solely reflect walk-in visitors.

Region 1 - Flathead Lake Unit estimates (2019-2021)

Sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



FLATHEAD LAKE UNIT	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
FL-Wayfarers	196,434	262,402	153,155	-41.6%	-22.0%
FL-Big Arm	50,579	68,264	62,168	-8.9%	+22.9%
FL-West Shore	29,127	38,839	44,097	+13.5%	+51.4%
FL-Yellow Bay	25,412	32,811	32,251	-1.7%	+26.9%
FL-Finley Point	29,106	47,443	30,930	-34.8%	+6.3%
FL-Wild Horse Island	24,168	21,950	17,030	-22.4%	-29.5%
TOTAL	354,826	471,709	339,631	-28.0%	-4.3%

NOTE: The entrance gate is seasonally closed during much of the winter at the Finley Point unit of Flathead. Additionally, in August 2021, there was a fire that closed the Finley Point area temporarily.

REGION 2

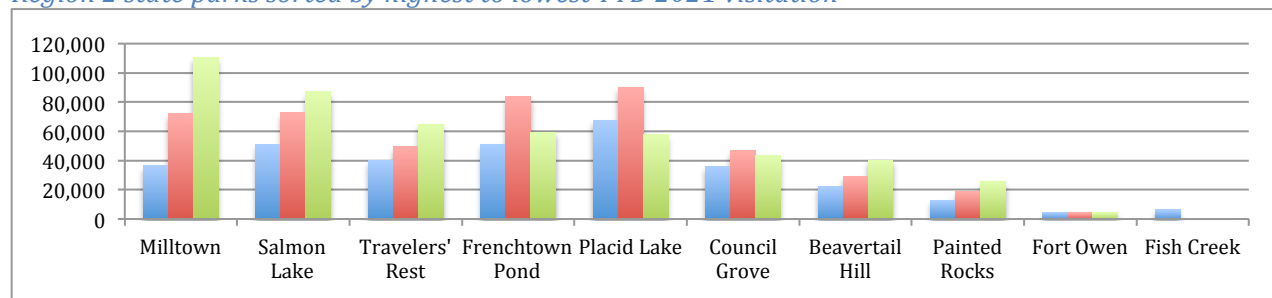
With an estimated **493,474** visitors in 2021, Region 2 experienced a **5.5%** increase over its 2020 visitation and was a notable **50.4%** higher than in 2019. Visitation in Region 2 represents **14.5%** of the system's total visitation for 2021.

A key driver of the region's visitation has been attributable to Milltown, which exceeded 100,000 visitors for the first time in 2021. It was the tenth most visited state park in the system. Some of the growth can be attributed to the use of additional trail counting devices, but the increase is unsurprising overall given a surge in awareness of the park, particularly for local residents. As the second newest state park in the system, a number of activities and organized events have sprung up and a collaborative shuttle effort between park staff and local groups was established to manage crowding at nearby Clark Fork River access points.

Other parks in the region that have experienced continuous growth in recent years include Salmon Lake, Traveler's Rest, Beavertail Hill, and Painted Rocks. The decline in visitation at Placid Lake, Frenchtown Pond, and Council Grove in 2021 is notable, but the latter two parks' estimates are still well above their 2019 visitation levels.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Region 2 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Milltown	36,387	72,433	110,732	+52.9%	+204.3%
Salmon Lake	50,754	72,709	86,987	+19.6%	+71.4%
Travelers' Rest	39,851	49,545	64,933	+31.1%	+62.9%
Frenchtown Pond	51,272	83,670	59,240	-29.2%	+15.5%
Placid Lake	67,695	90,179	57,752	-36.0%	-14.7%
Council Grove	35,868	46,757	43,249	-7.5%	+20.6%
Beavertail Hill	22,201	29,104	40,393	+38.8%	+81.9%
Painted Rocks	12,987	19,014	25,625	+34.8%	+97.3%
Fort Owen	4,796	4,495	4,563	+1.5%	-4.9%
Fish Creek	6,281	0	0	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	328,092	467,906	493,474	+5.5%	+50.4%

NOTE: Visitation data at Fish Creek was not regularly reported in 2020 or 2021 however staff will begin to collect data there in 2022. Fort Owen was temporarily closed for construction for a part of 2021. Lastly, seasonal closures at Beavertail Hill, Salmon Lake, and Placid Lake affect their visitation rates.

REGION 3

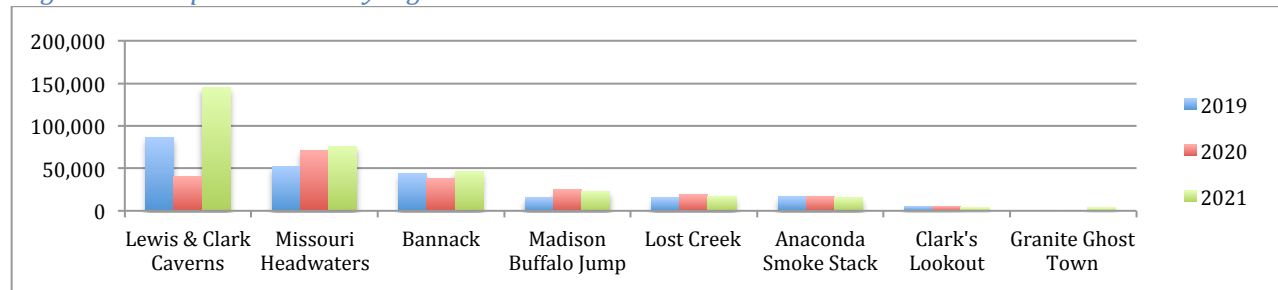
With an estimated **331,248** visitors in 2021, Region 3 experienced a **53.9%** increase over its 2020 visitation and was a notable **41.1%** higher than in 2019. Region 3's 2021 visitation represents **9.8%** of the system's total visitation.

The jump in visitation for the region is largely attributable to Lewis & Clark Caverns where cave tours reopened after being suspended in 2020. However, it is important to note that non-tour visitation at the Lewis & Clark Caverns has grown steadily. The park's proximity to Bozeman makes it an attractive getaway for that growing community, and its trail use and camping participation have both increased. Lewis & Clark Caverns was the seventh most visited state park in the system in 2021.

Missouri Headwaters and Bannack are two other parks in the region that have experienced steady growth. Meanwhile, visitation at Madison Buffalo Jump and Lost Creek in 2021 was below 2020 levels; however, it was above estimates for 2019. Visitation in 2021 was lower than in 2020 and 2019 at Anaconda Smoke Stack and Clark's Lookout, both small day-use sites that often serve as a nice lunch spot for locals.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Region 3 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Lewis & Clark Caverns	86,077	40,591	145,637	+258.8%	+69.2%
Missouri Headwaters	51,898	70,917	75,699	+6.7%	+45.9%
Bannack	43,804	38,085	46,583	+22.3%	+6.3%
Madison Buffalo Jump	15,649	24,715	23,192	-6.2%	+48.2%
Lost Creek	15,346	18,633	16,992	-8.8%	+10.7%
Anaconda Smoke Stack	16,309	16,787	15,796	-5.9%	-3.1%
Clark's Lookout	5,630	5,559	3,750	-32.5%	-33.4%
Granite Ghost Town	0	0	3,599	N/A	N/A
TOTAL	234,713	215,287	331,248	+53.9%	+41.1%

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Beaverhead Rock but will be soon. It was collected for the first time at Granite Ghost Town in 2021. Also of note is that Clark's Lookout is seasonally closed during the winter months.

REGION 4

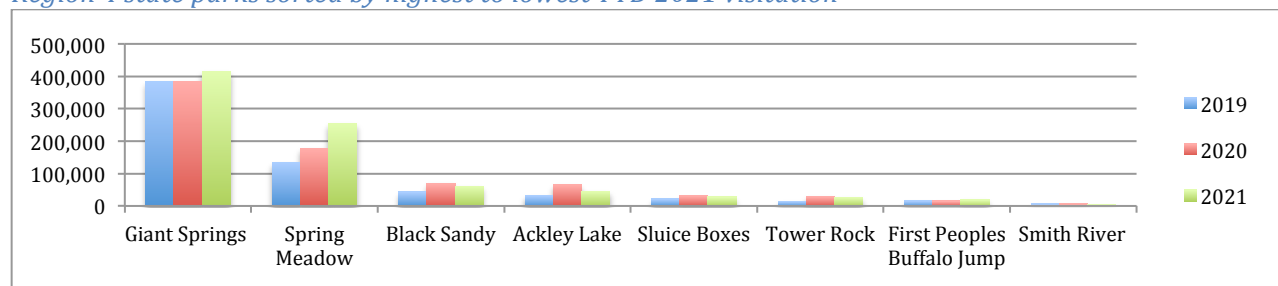
With an estimated **853,998** visitors in 2021, Region 4 experienced a **9.4%** increase over its 2020 visitation and was an estimated **30.6%** higher than in 2019. Region 4's 2021 visitation represents **25.2%** of the system's total visitation.

The region's overall visitation is largely driven by Giant Springs, which was Montana's most visited state park in 2021. It attracts numerous visitors and is a true destination for the city of Great Falls. Spring Meadow Lake is on a similar growth trajectory, and in 2021 was the fourth most visited state park. Some of the growth is attributable to additional trail counting devices, but the park continues to host events, educational activities in conjunction with MT Wild, and offers the Helena community a wonderful space for recreating outdoors. First People's Buffalo Jump also saw gains in visitation. In 2021, it experienced an impressive rebound in visitation as staff members resumed educational and interpretive opportunities suspended in 2020.

Four parks in the region - Black Sandy, Ackley Lake, Sluice Boxes, and Tower Rock - experienced slight declines in their 2021 visitation compared to 2020, but all were well above their 2019 estimates. Lastly, drought conditions severely impacted the Smith River this year. With record- low levels of water and river flows, floating opportunities trickled to a halt.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Region 4 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Giant Springs	384,023	384,309	414,889	+8.0%	8.0%
Spring Meadow	134,992	178,156	254,141	+42.7%	88.3%
Black Sandy	43,241	69,288	61,518	-11.2%	42.3%
Ackley Lake	32,522	66,480	45,715	-31.2%	40.6%
Sluice Boxes	22,085	31,847	27,767	-12.8%	25.7%
Tower Rock	14,777	29,172	26,532	-9.0%	79.5%
First Peoples Buffalo Jump	16,202	15,376	19,286	+25.4%	19.0%
Smith River	6,097	6,271	4,150	-33.8%	-31.9%
TOTAL	653,939	780,899	853,998	9.4%	30.6%

NOTE: Currently, visitation data is not regularly collected at Elkhorn. Visitation data for the Smith River is captured using float logs and is not recorded during the winter months.

REGION 5

With an estimated **562,583** visitors in 2021, Region 5 experienced a **16.8%** decrease below its 2020 visitation yet was an estimated **25.2%** higher than in 2019. Region 5's 2021 visitation represents **16.2%** of the system's total visitation.

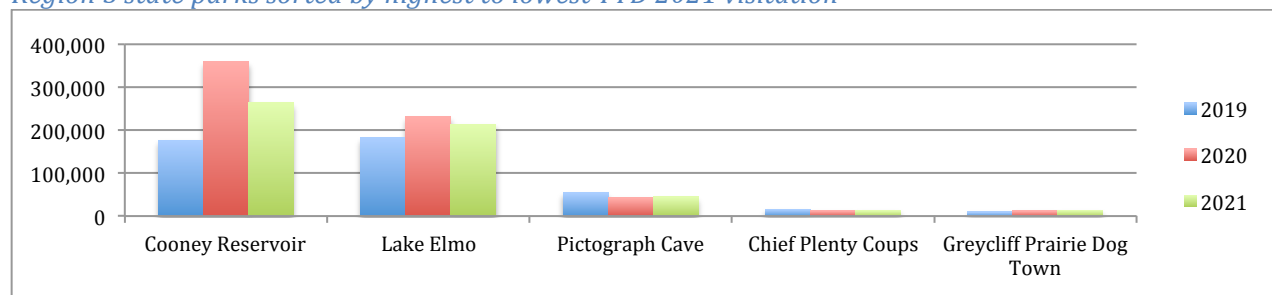
There are two parks that largely drive the region's overall visitation - Cooney Reservoir and Lake Elmo. They were the third and fifth most visited state parks in the system, respectively. Both saw growth drop in 2021 from 2020 levels, but their visitation still exceeded 2019 and previous years. Both experience frequent use by residents of the growing Billings community. In the fall, FWP drained Lake Elmo to help ameliorate the presence of Asian clams, which attracted curious residents to the park.

Also close to Billings is Pictograph Cave, a park that experienced a slight rebound in 2021 compared to 2020, despite a temporary four-month closure caused by a rock fall. Chief Plenty Coups, located on the Crow Reservation, experienced a similar pattern in its visitation, once again drawing in many local residents and others.

Lastly, Greycliff Prairie Dog Town experienced consistent growth, acting as a nice rest stop for I-90 travelers to stretch their legs take in the beautiful scenery and wildlife.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Region 5 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Cooney Reservoir	175,870	359,607	263,691	-26.7%	49.9%
Lake Elmo	182,022	231,388	212,916	-8.0%	17.0%
Pictograph Cave	54,273	42,870	44,569	4.0%	-17.9%
Chief Plenty Coups	15,907	13,017	13,352	2.6%	-16.1%
Greycliff Prairie Dog Town	10,206	12,677	14,151	11.6%	38.7%
TOTAL	438,278	659,559	548,678	-16.8%	25.2%

NOTE: Greycliff Prairie Dog Town is seasonally closed during winter months.

REGIONS 6 and 7

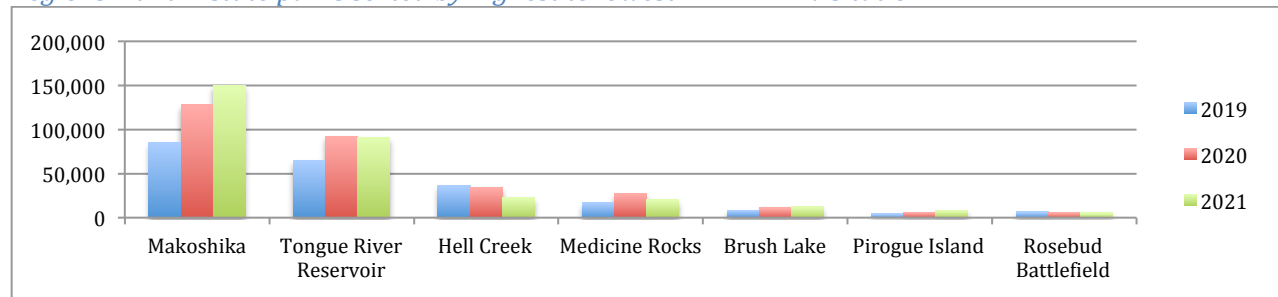
With an estimated **309,489** visitors, Regions 6 and 7 experienced a **1.0%** increase over its 2020 visitation and was an estimated **39.3%** higher than in 2019. Regions 6 and 7 visitation represents **9.1%** of the system's total visitation for 2021.

Two parks - Makoshika and Tongue River Reservoir - largely drive the region's overall visitation. In 2021, they were the sixth and twelfth most visited state parks in the system. Makoshika's visitation has been steadily on the rise year after year. While visitation at Tongue River Reservoir experienced a very slight decline in 2021 compared to 2020, it was well above its 2019 estimates. Medicine Rocks followed along a similar trend, although the decline between 2021 and 2020 was larger.

Visitation at two parks in the region - Brush Lake and Pirogue Island - has steadily increased. By contrast, visitation at Hell Creek and Rosebud Battlefield has decreased.

Estimated 2019-2021 visitation

Regions 6 and 7 state parks sorted by highest to lowest YTD 2021 visitation



PARK	TOTAL 2019	TOTAL 2020	TOTAL 2021	% Change between 2020 and 2021	% Change between 2019 and 2021
Makoshika	85,272	128,288	150,484	+17.3%	+76.5%
Tongue River Reservoir	64,504	92,492	90,859	-1.8%	+40.9%
Hell Creek	36,189	34,515	22,349	-35.2%	-38.2%
Medicine Rocks	16,819	27,527	20,140	-26.8%	+19.7%
Brush Lake	8,556	11,270	12,181	+8.1%	+42.4%
Pirogue Island	4,340	6,209	8,016	+29.1%	+84.7%
Rosebud Battlefield	6,563	5,973	5,460	-8.6%	-16.8%
TOTAL	222,243	306,274	309,489	+1.0%	+39.3%

NOTE: Brush Lake is seasonally closed in the winter months.

ⁱ **Reporting notes:**

Visitation data is based on reported estimates from 45 of Montana's 55 state parks. In the winter, some parks and/or campground entrances are seasonally closed. While the system does experience some off-season camping, numbers have traditionally been low. Typically, most campgrounds do not open until May 1 with reservations beginning on May 15. (In 2020, during the earlier months of the year, some parks were seasonally closed. In several instances campgrounds were temporarily closed on/around March 21 due to the state's COVID-19 directive.)

FWP is working with experts at the University of Montana's Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) to gain assistance with revising parks' visitation methodology. Additionally, FWP added counting devices to entrances where either (a) existing counters were nearing the end of their useful life, or (b) there simply were none installed. Prior to 2020, visitation data only included estimates for visitors arriving by vehicle. Since then, walk-in/bike-in visitors have been counted leading to some degree of growth in estimates.

It should also be noted that FWP occasionally evaluates its methodological approaches and in turn may determine the need to make slight revisions to a previous month's total to improve accuracy. In 2021, this occurred at Chief Plenty Coups where estimates for January-September 2021 were revised downward.

For questions about this report, contact Kyan Bishop, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Planner, at Kyan.Bishop@mt.gov or at (406) 444-3364.