



Montana is a unique blend of the wild and the domestic, both equally important to the state's culture, identity, and quality of life. PHOTO BY DAVE RUMMANS

Afterword

There you have it—our take on rural Montana.

Of course, this special issue of *Montana Outdoors* is by no means comprehensive, even if it's the biggest one we've ever

published. And it likely contains a few errors, despite our best efforts to double-check facts and run stories past experts.

Yet warts and all, this issue represents a sincere attempt to understand and explain Montana's working lands. It was produced so that more people who live in and visit this state can recognize and respect what many of us cluelessly drive past or

through while heading to our favorite trout stream or hunting area, trailhead or state park.

As for what's in store for this rural landscape you've just learned about—no one can say for certain.

One thing we do know is that for decades, Montana's rural population has been getting grayer and sparser. The Treasure State has the most residents over 65 per capita west of the Mississippi and the nation's ninth-oldest

population. Meanwhile, resident numbers in most rural counties are dwindling, except in the Bakken oil fields and areas close to the state's western cities.

Will those demographic trends continue? It seems likely but, again, no one knows.

Because another trend is that more people are coming to Montana—visitors and new residents—at rates not seen since the homestead era more than a century ago. Mostly

they've flocked to cities and major towns, but increasingly that influx is also being felt in rural communities and on working lands.

It's too early to tell if this is good news or bad for rural residents and communities. But as I drive through our state, with its unique and wonderful mix of wild and domestic landscapes, I realize that everyone here—apart from Montana's Indigenous residents—is essentially a newcomer. All of us, or our ances-

tors, came to this place to begin a new life. Recent arrivals are likely doing the same.

My welcoming advice to them would be to learn a bit about Montana's working lands. This is a wide and varied place. The more we know about it, the more we can appreciate not only the many facets of Montana, but also the diversity of people who call this place home.

—Tom Dickson, Editor