CHARTING A NEW TOMORROW

FINAL PLAN

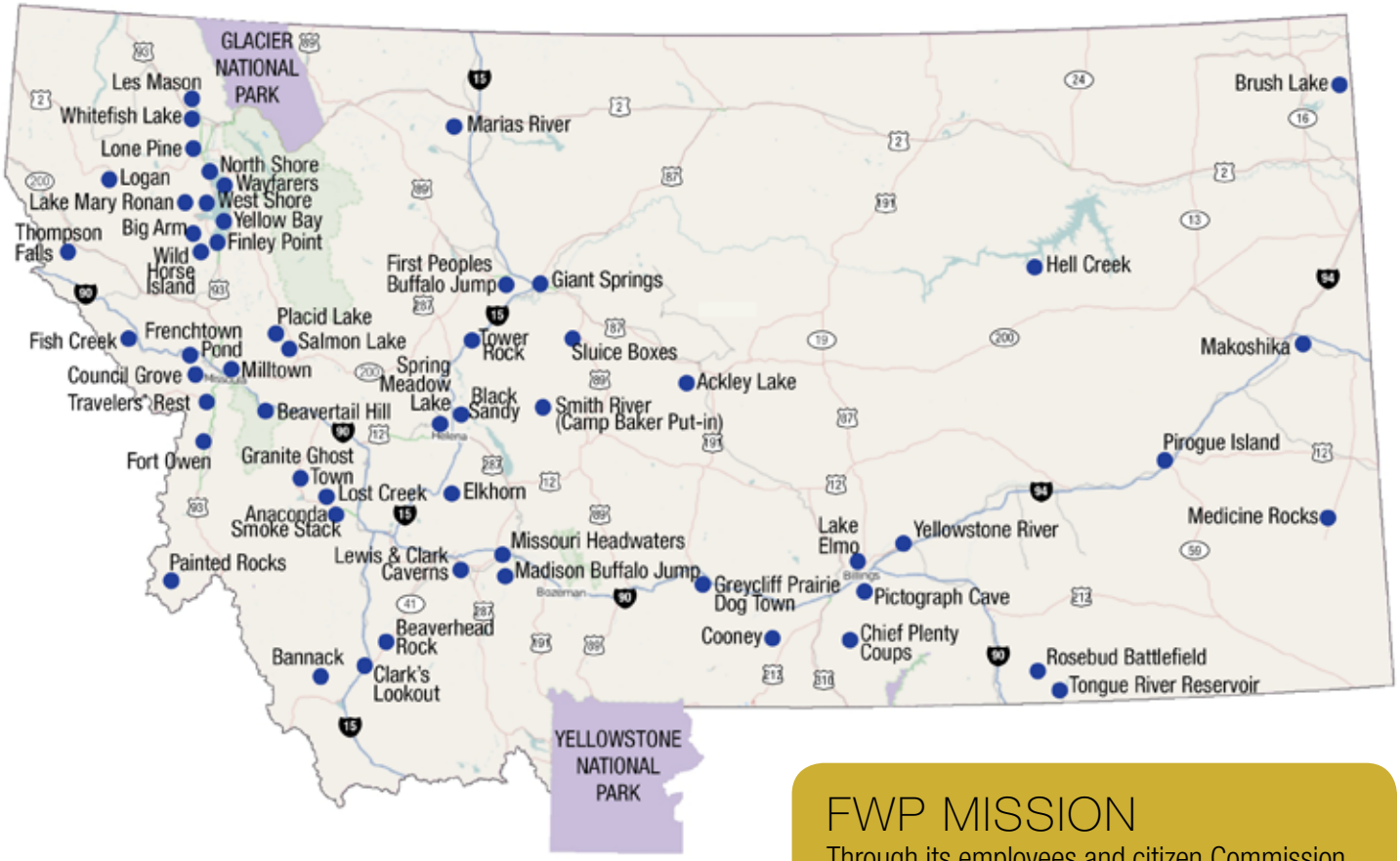
MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION STRATEGIC PLAN

2015-2020

MONTANA STATE PARKS

stateparks.mt.gov
Explore More.

WELCOME TO MONTANA STATE PARKS



FWP MISSION

Through its employees and citizen Commission, provide for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks and recreational resources of Montana while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

PARKS DIVISION MISSION

Preserve and protect our state's cultural, natural and recreational heritage for the benefit of our families, communities, and local economies.

Quick Facts:

- 55 State Parks covering 46,538 acres
- 7 National Historic Landmarks
- 4 Recreation Grant Programs
- Over 2 million visits annually

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of the Montana State Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan was made possible through the input and support of members of the public and Montana Legislature, key stakeholders and supporters, Montana State Parks & Recreation Board, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff.

This plan was developed by the following:

Steering Committee:
Chas Van Genderen, Division Administrator
Roger Semler, Assistant Administrator
Maren Murphy, Lead Planner
Betsy Kirkeby, Acting Marketing & Communications Manager

Advisory Committee:
Jeff Hagener, FWP Director
Tom Reilly, Assistant Administrator
Regional Park Managers:
Dave Landstrom (Northwest)
Chet Crowser (Southwest)
Matt Marcinek (South Central)
John Taillie (North Central)
Doug Habermann (Eastern)

Approved December 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter from the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board 1

Introduction 2

Strategic Framework 4

Brand Promise 5

Goals, Targets and Actions 8

- A. Resources and Approaches 10
- B. Fiscal Sustainability 14
- C. Services & Experiences 20
- D. Partnerships and Engagement 24
- E. Awareness and Outreach 28

Implementation 32

Appendix A. Endnotes 34

Appendix B. Internal & External Engagement 35

Appendix C. State Parks & Recreation Board 37

LETTER FROM THE MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

Dear Friends:

We tasked the agency with creating **Charting a New Tomorrow: Montana State Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan** to serve as a guiding framework for management of the park system and statewide recreational programs through 2020 to address longstanding challenges. This plan is an innovative and business-minded management approach that will maximize available resources, develop partnerships and build public engagement to create a bright and healthy future for outdoor recreation across the state.

This is an exciting time for outdoor recreation in Montana, but it is also a challenging one. Over the next few months, we will focus on swift and thorough implementation of the strategic plan. It will take full commitment from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to ensure the success of this endeavor.

For 75 years, Montana State Parks has continued to provide quality educational and outdoor recreational opportunities to the people of Montana and its visitors. The Division preserves and protects invaluable natural, cultural and historical resources, enhances communities through Montana's four recreational trails grants and AmeriCorps program, and contributes to Montana's $5.8 billion outdoor recreation industry. Montana State Parks is proud of this heritage and deeply committed to serving Montana's outdoor recreation needs for future generations.

With the goals set forth in this Strategic Plan, we can fulfill our mission managing these significant, relevant, and accessible places for Montana citizens and their guests to enjoy well into the future. If we do our jobs well, the park system and recreation landscape will continue to thrive. We deliver this strategic plan to you with a promise to answer the challenges set forth, and in the process make Montana State Parks and its recreation programs one of the strongest systems in the country.

Sincerely,

Thomas E. Towe	Mary Sexton	Diane Conradi	Jeff Welch	Doug Smith
Board Chairman	Vice Chair			

BUILDING **SOLUTIONS**

Montana State Parks is at an important crossroads. The park system has experienced considerable growth and improvement since its beginning in 1939. With over 2 million visits each year, Montana's 55 parks are a vital part of the quality of life that all residents enjoy.

But the park system has and continues to face many challenges. Historically, there appears to be a lack of appreciation or understanding for Montana's state parks and recreation programs. Funding and staffing levels have remained stagnant. The system also has a growing backlog of deferred maintenance needs and declining facilities.

This strategic plan looks at Montana's state parks and recreation programs over the next five years. Under the guidance of the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board (Parks Board), the plan presents a fresh and innovative approach. Key targets and solutions are outlined to overcome the challenges facing the system. The plan also calls for reinvestment in the Montana State Park system.

To move forward, we must strategically assess key questions like:

- **How many state parks should there be?**
- **What characterizes a state park?**
- **How should we prioritize resources across the system to address fiscal shortcomings while maintaining affordability for all?**

The final plan is a result of a year-long process shaped by extensive internal and external input. Division staff, members of the Legislature, agency partners, user groups, and other stakeholders provided key input through surveys, community listening sessions, and public review. From this, we refined the goals and developed specific actions to set our direction and measure our success.

We cannot discuss each and every program or focus of the park system in this plan. Our focus is to highlight key issues and challenges while also allowing for growth and opportunities as we put the plan into action.

This plan identifies key metrics and opportunities that will make us the **strongest park system in the country.**

MONTANA STATE PARKS

TIMELINE: 1939 TO 2014

1939

FIRST STATE PARK

Montana State Parks and Commission established with Lewis and Clark Cavern State Park.

1953

COMMISSION ABOLISHED

Montana State Parks Commission abolished and lands transferred to Montana Highway Commission.

1965

MONTANA FISH & GAME

Transferred to Montana Fish & Game, which was renamed Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in 1979.

1990

FUTURES COMMITTEE I[1]

In 1990, a Committee was appointed by the Governor to analyze the system and develop recommendations to improve it. The Committee found that the system was under-developed and at risk without additional investment and attention. Recommendations were made to address planning and management needs, enhance the image and marketing of the system, develop new partnerships with tourism and organizations, and invest funds for capital improvements, operations, and equipment needs.

2002

FUTURES COMMITTEE II[2]

In 2002, a second Committee was appointed to analyze the park system. Many of the same challenges continued to hinder the system—notably inadequate staffing and funding levels. The report found that the Division was unable to maximize the visitor experience due to degraded infrastructure and resources. In addition, the report found that there is continued poor public perception and understanding of the state park system.

2012

HJR 32 REPORT[3]

The Environmental Quality Council prepared a 2012 report for the Legislature to analyze the system through a comparative analysis with neighboring state park systems. The report found that Montana State Parks is one of the largest systems in the Rocky Mountain West, but has a smaller operating budget and lower staffing levels. Ultimately, the report recommended the creation of a Montana State Parks & Recreation Board to address these challenges through public dialogue and consistent attention.

2013

MONTANA STATE PARKS & RECREATION BOARD

Montana State Parks & Recreation Board established by Legislature with overwhelming support.

2014

75TH ANNIVERSARY

Montana State Parks celebrates its 75th Anniversary.

Celebrating 75 Years

MONTANA STATE PARKS SINCE 1939

Explore More.
stateparks.mt.gov

STRATEGIC **FRAMEWORK**

The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board developed the following strategic framework to strengthen each part of system. This framework reflects the most prudent use of public funds, innovative approaches to public/private partnerships, and the highest sense of accountability to all the citizens of Montana.

DEVELOP DIVERSIFIED & SUSTAINABLE FUNDING

Develop a diversified and sustainable funding model for the state park system that:

- Addresses both operational expenses and capital projects to maintain and improve parks;
- Maximizes appropriate state funding, increases earned revenue, and builds a philanthropic revenue;
- Applies best practices to the management of public resources for the public benefit; and
- Better leverages existing Federal funding opportunities that require a state match.

GROW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Deepen existing and build new strategic partnerships with key organizations and partners who have a shared stake in the operations and the success of the state park system. Key strategic partners identified by the Board include other divisions in the Department; tourism industry; historic preservation; Tribal governments; non-profits; and local city and county governments and entities.

BUILD AN ENGAGED CONSTITUENCY

To better serve and more deeply engage Montana citizens, the Division will develop approaches for regular communication with individual constituents as well as a wide range of stakeholder groups. Initial constituents includes user groups, service organizations, organizational partners like the Montana Trails, Recreation & Parks Association, federal agencies, private business partners like concessionaires, elected officials and opinion leaders, and the general public.

WHAT IS OUR **BRAND?**

Outdoor recreation is an integral part of Montana's heritage. Montana's state parks have the role of telling the story of our unique natural, cultural, and recreational resources, and preserving this legacy for future generations to appreciate and enjoy. The system also provides significant economic benefits to local communities and the tourism industry. But since its beginning in 1939, the park system has struggled with limited public awareness, understanding and recognition.

That is why a brand is important. It unites us. It communicates the essential attributes that distinguish Montana State Parks and the experiences our visitors can expect. It provides a strategic roadmap with a unified voice. And perhaps more so, a brand is a "promise to deliver" made between Montana State Parks and our customers—something that is consistent across the system and does not change from park to park or year to year.

Just like the Montana tourism brand reflects the public perception of the state to residents and visitors and provides a tool to promote Montana's assets, the Montana State Parks brand is our promise to our customers and partners.

Using the Montana tourism brand as a model, branding Montana State Parks will:

- ✧ Unite efforts to enhance Montana State Parks with a more cohesive voice.
- ✧ Help all Montanans and visitors understand and appreciate Montana State Parks, recreation programs and the outdoor heritage of this state.
- ✧ Enhance the outdoor recreation industry and support Montana's tourism economy.
- ✧ Give staff the basis they need to promote the state parks and recreation programs with this unified voice.
- ✧ Bolster parks and recreation across the state.

MONTANA STATE PARKS ARE...

▶ SIGNIFICANT

Montana State Parks manages **significant sites**, representing the statewide scenic, historic, cultural, scientific, and recreational legacy of Montana's heritage.

▶ RELEVANT

Montana State Parks provides **relevant programs and experiences** that create lasting memories for Montana families and visitors and support our tourism economy.

▶ ACCESSIBLE

Montana State Parks are **accessible for all** regardless of wealth, physical ability, or location in the state.

Our Values

Service
We are service oriented, and proud of our strong work ethic.

Safety
We are committed to integrated public safety and education.

Stewardship
We are dedicated stewards of our resources with well-maintained park facilities and amenities.

Sustainability
We are fiscally responsible while preserving affordability for all.

Five goals and accompanying targets and actions are detailed in this section.

This strategic plan is not intended to list all potential actions that may be undertaken over the next five years, but rather the actions that Parks Board, staff, and citizens have identified as important for supporting and strengthening the system.

The following targets and actions are intended to provide overarching direction for the Montana State Parks through 2020. We will also conduct an assessment of key statutes and regulations to identify necessary changes and updates for the success of the plan.

To be successful in this endeavor, we must use a holistic, systems thinking approach to align our programs and management strategies at all levels. By being consistent in our approach and working with strategic partners and engaged constituents, we can bring leadership and professionalism to the outdoor recreation field in Montana and nationally.

Each goal is outlined with supporting targets and actions to accomplish over the next five years. Specific leads and timelines are identified for actions. Some actions are ongoing, and the Division will assign responsibility as necessary.

Changes the Division will pursue include proposals to update to the statutes and rules to better define a state park and reflect the brand promise, revisions to the public use regulations to provide more details and clarification on park management and operations, and development of new management systems and policies to support the strategy outlined in this plan.

A key outcome of this plan will be to set priorities and allocate resources to the most significant sites in the system.

"A comprehensive review of state parks is needed to determine the viability of all [55] sites. What should or should not be in the state park system? Should some sites be developed or interpreted in a different, more meaningful way?"

- Helena listening session

A RESOURCES AND APPROACHES

A healthy park system needs resources for good stewardship today and tomorrow. Ninety-nine percent of Montanans say it is important for Montana to have state parks.[4] Investing in our state parks is a sound investment in preserving our natural, cultural, and recreational legacy. The focus of this strategic plan is to produce effective solutions to enhance the system with the resources that are available. But we must also look for opportunities to grow as appropriate.

On adoption of this plan, we will align the system with the brand promise of significant, relevant, and accessible. We will classify sites and establish resource standards that will help us manage the most significant sites as state parks. This will ultimately help us provide a higher level of staffing, operational, and funding levels, and a more cohesive voice and consistent experiences.

Public land is important to Montanans and our legacy of outdoor recreation. When classifying parks, we will keep parks in public ownership by exploring opportunities for strategic partnerships to manage sites that do not meet the brand promise. We also recognize that continued protection of significant sites is necessary, and we will work with communities to bring forward funded and supported concepts for acquisition and expansion of services. To ensure transparency in decision-making, we will work closely with the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board to engage Montanans at all levels throughout this process.

GOAL A:

Manage significant, relevant, and accessible parks and programs in a manner that is consistent with available resources.

Target 1: Prioritize the Division's most significant sites, resources, and programs.

- The Division will classify parks of statewide significance, relevance, and accessibility by end of 2015 with the following:
    1. Establish a course of action for a classification process by end of 2014.
    2. Upon plan adoption, form an internal committee to develop criteria, analyze parks and develop recommendations for Parks Board and public consideration by the August 2015 Board Meeting.
    3. Upon final Board approval of classification, adjust services, management approaches, and expectations in 2016.
- The Division will establish standards to demonstrate staffing needs and operational levels for consistent management across the system based on peer analysis by mid 2015. Set priorities for allocating staffing and funding resources aligned with the most significant state parks.
- Park Managers will partner with communities, foundations, and constituents to close gaps and improve services as opportunities arise to keep affected sites in public domain.
- Capital Program Staff will conduct an inventory of facility conditions by 2016. Implement a maintenance management system by 2017.
- Operations Program Staff will develop appropriate management plans and master site plans for priority parks.
- Operations Program Staff will develop a system-wide heritage resource strategy to address unique management challenges and opportunities of historic sites by 2017.

Target 2: Increase partnerships in alignment with the Division mission to enhance resource stewardship and opportunities while building the brand.

- Park Managers will support partners to address resource needs and bring forth progressive, engaged and funded concepts for expanding strategic acquisition, services, and economic development.
- Regional Park Managers will develop interagency and organizational partnerships to share staff, expertise, and resources to help offset operations and maintenance costs by 2018.
- Park Managers and Operations Program Staff will expand opportunities to integrate friends groups, user groups, and interested citizens into stewardship and management activities. Implement a process for partnering with groups, including a Memorandum of Understanding where appropriate.
- The Division will achieve interagency programming within a larger recreation context to deliver cohesive experiences with other related sites and properties.

Target 3: Foster professionalism and empowerment in staff and the industry.

- The Division will develop career pathways for key positions to encourage internal advancement and strengthen external recruitment in a positive environment.
- The Division will improve professional staff expertise in underrepresented programs including but not limited to natural resource protection, visitor use and volunteer management, concessions management, GIS applications, and trail design and maintenance.
- Regional Park Managers will incentivize staff engagement with communities to support progressive partnerships.
- Park Managers and Operations Program Staff will engage communities to expand our stewardship and programming through ongoing emphasis.

The long-term success of Montana State Parks depends on our ability to achieve a sustainable business model.

"Montana State Parks provide a sense of history, understanding of historical events and lifeways, and interaction with the built environment and cultural landscapes."

- Missoula listening session

B FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Fiscal health and sustainability are key to the long-term success of Montana's state parks and recreation programs. Stagnant funding levels, limited staffing, and the rising cost of land and facility maintenance present real challenges to long-term stability. We will meet these challenges with a renewed focus on developing diversified funding to grow revenue streams and boost philanthropic investment in the park system. We will aggressively pursue new partnerships to leverage resources and increase the capacity of our budgets to generate income and grow sustainably.

State parks are a vital component of Montana's recreation economy. Visitors to Montana State Parks spend over $289 million annually on gear, lodging, retail, gasoline and more, and sustain more than 1,600 tourism jobs in local communities.[5] Stronger investment in state parks will increase this impact and better reflect the economic contribution of the park system to Montana's local and state economies. We will be able to better protect park resources and human safety, improve the integrity of park infrastructure, and enhance the visitor experience to meet the needs of our customers.

When we combine our fiscal sustainability with active pursuit of new sources of revenue and partnerships, we can provide the foundation of quality and affordability that Montanans need and expect from their state park system.

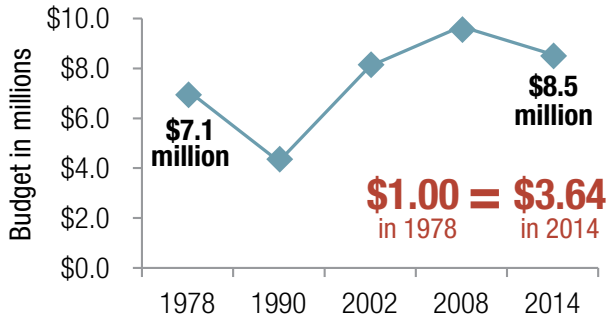
A SOLID FOUNDATION

Every business must generate revenue to survive. The Montana State Park system is no different. With no funding from hunting or fishing licenses or the state General Fund for day-to-day operations and management, revenue generation becomes a key method for creating a sustainable future.

But current revenues are inadequate as expenditures and cost of operations continue to grow. The light vehicle registration fee is currently the largest funding source for the park system. The increase in the fee from $4 to $6 in 2011 has helped boost the Division fund balance with a 77% participation rate, but this fee is voluntary and participation varies by county across the state.

Twenty-five years of reports have documented that the park system has been consistently underfunded and underdeveloped from the beginning. Since the 1970s, the real spending power of the Division budget has only increased $1.4 million, when adjusted for inflation--all the while operating costs and maintenance needs have continued to increase.

Division Operating Budget, Adjusted to 2014 Dollars[6]



Visitors to Montana State Parks contribute

$289 million in total spending

Visitors to Montana State Parks sustain

1,600 jobs annually

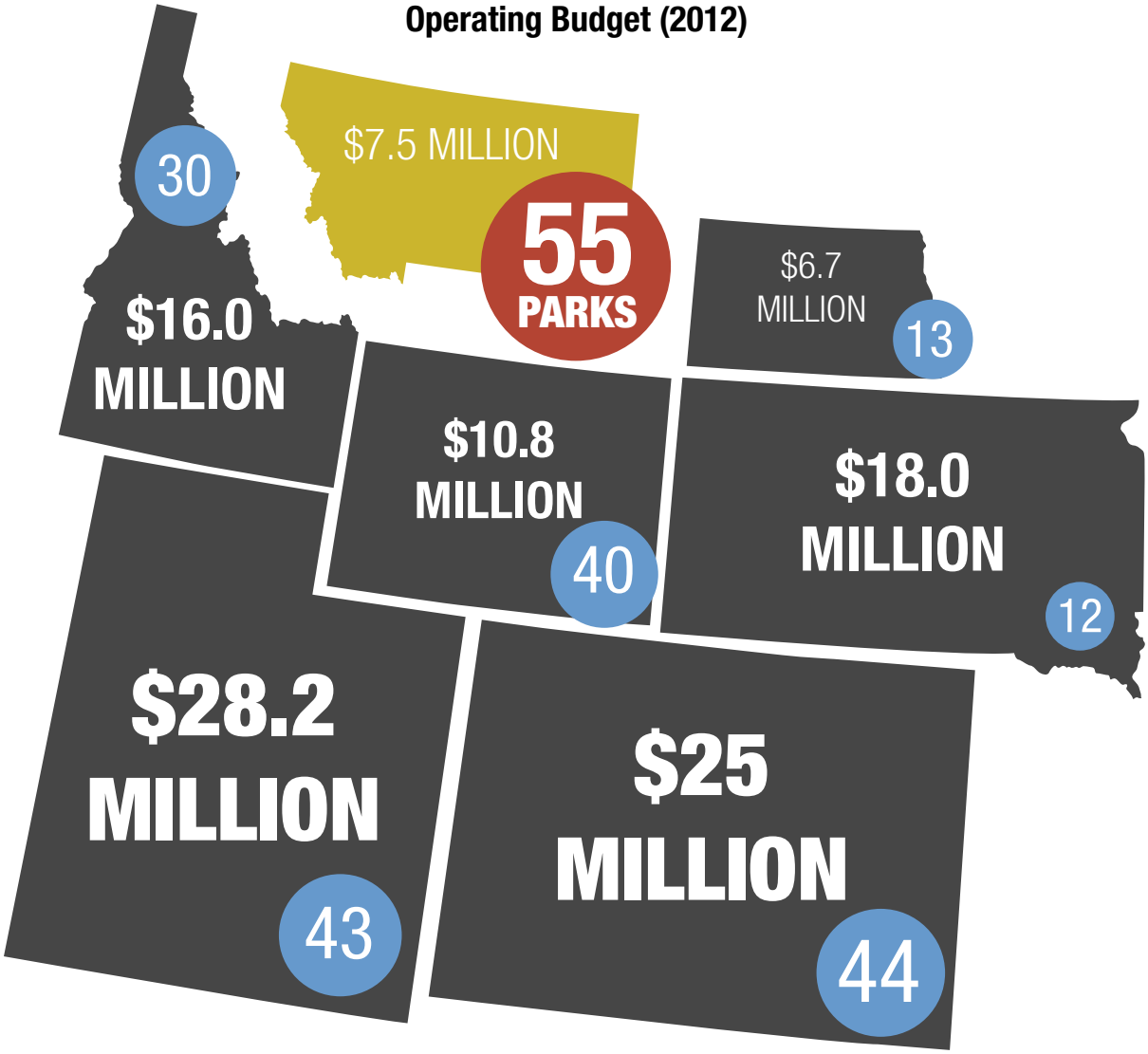
Funding challenges at the local and federal levels must also be discussed. Recreation programs across the state have seen a decrease in budgets in recent years. The Land & Water Conservation Fund program has provided over $38 million in grants for community recreation projects since 1965. However, funding levels have decreased 88% since peak levels in 1979.[7] In 2013, Montana communities requested over $3.9 million in Recreation Trail Program funds. With only $1.3 million in allocations from Congress, $2.3 million in requests were unable to be funded.

As available funding for recreation decreases at the federal level, we continue to see a higher demand for state funding to support recreation at the city and county level. A new model must be brought forward to supplement public funding with revenues and philanthropic support, and to enhance the impact of state funds with a wider scope that supports city and county recreation.

Comparison of State Park Systems in the Rocky Mountain West

In 2012, the Environmental Quality Council produced a report to the Legislature to analyze the state park system for the fourth time in 25 years. **HJR 32 Report on State Parks, Outdoor Recreation, and Heritage Resource Programs** analyzed Montana State Parks in comparison to other systems in the Rocky Mountain West.[8] The report found that at 55 state parks, Montana has the largest state parks system in the region. Conversely, with an operating budget of $7.5 million in fiscal year 2012, it has one of the smallest budgets. The Division also has the lowest level of full-time staffing in the region. These findings, which have been echoed in previous reports, are key to understanding the fiscal and resource challenges related to the long-term capacity of the system.

Number of State Parks and Operating Budget (2012)



GOAL B:

Develop diversified and sustainable funding for Montana State Parks and statewide recreation programs.

Target 1: Grow revenue streams to meet visitor needs and cover increasing cost of operations.

- Park Managers will expand parks earned revenue streams (fees, retail, concession revenue) by 100% by 2019.
- Business Program Staff will develop business plans for key parks to assist with implementation, and explore opportunities to partner with a consultant or Montana universities for expertise.
- Park Managers will identify opportunities to double the number of concessionaires in state parks.
- Leadership will develop strategies to increase the current participation rate for the light vehicle registration fee across the state.

Target 2: Establish a secure funding source for the Division and expand support for city, county, and state recreation.

- The Division will quantify operational fiscal needs within the park system through standards and processes to improve management overall by the end of June 2015.
- The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will pursue dedicated funding sources to meet fiscal needs, including but not limited to: amending the vehicle registration to be mandatory and pursuing a statutory increase; redirecting portion of other state funding sources, such as an increase in the coal tax or earnings from the lottery; pursuing a ballot initiative for a parks and trails bond; advocating that general fund monies are appropriated to parks and recreation; establishing a new funding source from excise taxes related to non-consumptive uses; etc.
- With dedicated sources in place, the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will establish a state grant program to supplant federal funding for use in renovation and replacement of facilities and resources in parks, recreation and trails for city, county, state, school districts, Tribal lands and others as a means of supporting communities, our tourism economy and assuring all providers have a stable, supported program.

Target 3: Foster private investment and philanthropy to raise a minimum of $4.0 million for the park system by 2020.

- The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will cultivate and leverage potential investments by philanthropic donors and corporate partners for important, exciting projects and initiatives that support a legacy and enrich Montana's outdoor heritage.
- Leadership will develop policies for acceptance of charitable gifts and appropriate donor recognition as well as the development of other private contributions.
- Regional Park Managers will identify exciting legacy projects across the system with potential charitable partners.
- Park Managers will actively apply for grants to supplement stewardship goals and capital projects.
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff will identify incentives to promote and highlight existing partnerships of sites with cities and counties.

Target 4: Enhance the dialogue on recreation funding at the state and national level.

- The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will engage citizens to discuss how recreation is funded within Montana, including who is paying for recreation, where monies are spent, and ways to build a strong model of ongoing support between industry, agencies, and citizens.
- The Division will work with the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board, Fish & Wildlife Commission, Land Board, elected officials, and key stakeholders for the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act in 2015 to full funding and at equitable levels between federal and stateside apportionments. Encourage broadening the criteria to reflect maintenance costs, and to allow communities to more easily re-purpose previously funded recreation developments to reflect changes in demand.

"Montana State Parks has an incredible opportunity to provide high quality recreation, motorized and non-motorized, on state and federal lands. The [recreation grant] programs can have huge impacts on quality of life, environmental sustainability and economic sustainability."

- Great Falls listening session

C SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES

Montana's state parks are owned by the people of Montana. They provide everyday opportunities for people to play, experience nature, and learn about the state's history. We are hearing that demand for services and programming is increasing, and visitors are looking for a variety of experiences and amenities—from backcountry and rustic adventures to developed experiences with electrical hook-ups, Wi-Fi, and boating facilities.[10] Visitation has increased over 25% in the last decade, and more than 2.185 million visits occurred in 2014. Over 26,000 students participated in educational programs in 2013 and there were close to 50,000 occupied nights at state park campgrounds.

Over the last 25 years, Montana State Parks has taken steps to unify the system under a cohesive mission and vision. We have also worked hard to communicate effectively through innovative marketing and awareness campaigns—but we must do much more.

Core to the our brand will be providing a high-quality visitor experience that is consistent across the units and programs. To do this, we must strategically evaluate the kinds of experiences, programs, and sites that are most significant, relevant and accessible. Expanding facilities and amenities, growing concessionaire opportunities, and fostering partnerships to enhance to programming will help deepen the relevance of our services and experiences.

GOAL C:

Enrich the visitor experience for all consistent with the brand promise.

Target 1: Expand services and recreation opportunities.

- Leadership will reallocate staffing and funding to prioritize the most significant parks in alignment with operational standards supported by the brand.
- Park Managers will integrate public safety and risk management into all aspects of park operations.
- Regional Park Managers will conduct a system-wide facility assessment by 2016 make improvements as necessary. Adopt achievable universal design standards, and update public information on accessible facilities and amenities.
- Park Managers will identify partners and concessionaire opportunities to utilize better and more park acreage in ways that expands value-added services and innovative offerings, such as recreation equipment rentals, guided tours, zip lines, treehouse camping and other opportunities.
- Operations Program Staff will update surveys to understand current economic impacts, visitor needs and satisfaction levels by end of 2016.
- Park Managers will develop relevant programming to better promote our cultural and natural history to attract international visitors traveling through Montana.

Target 2: Enhance educational experiences to connect visitors to natural, cultural, and recreational resources.

- Park Managers and Operations Program Staff will continue to expand interpretive programming, including field schools, use of digital media, and opportunities for passive engagement while building experiential depth. Partner with Tribal governments, recreation providers, universities, and non-profit organizations to develop and deliver programming.
- The Division will develop a stronger understanding of how to better engage Montana youth of all backgrounds. Identify opportunities to connect youth to the outdoors, including through stewardship, management activities, and engagement with the Parks Board.

Target 3: Build up state-administered recreation programs.

- Park Managers and Recreation Program Staff will promote outdoor skills and ethics through the development of strong education programming that increases awareness of visitor impacts.
- Park Managers and Recreation Program Staff will establish clearer and consistent communication processes for working with clubs and advisory committees.
- The Division will increase the organizational knowledge and leadership for trail planning expertise to assist communities and users as appropriate and funded.
- Operations and Recreation Program Staff will revise and update the Montana State Trails Plan by 2020 through a collaborative process with partnering agencies and user groups. Improve the availability, usability, and awareness of trails data on public lands around the state.

Effective partnerships can maximize our limited resources and improve the net benefit to the public for services and experiences.

"Critical to all recreation providers and public land managers are reliable funding sources. At the statewide level there is a need to foster strategic partnerships and develop sustainable revenue streams for parks and recreation."

- Montana Trails, Recreation and Park Association

D PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

Partnerships are vital to the our success. The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board identified cultivating strategic partnerships and engaged constituents as a major focus for the strategic plan. For Montana State Parks to thrive, we must go beyond our agency boundaries and engage all stakeholders and supporters in active discussions to develop multi-faceted solutions.

The recreation industry has historically lacked coordinated leadership at the local, state and national levels. This is evident in the fact that recreation providers across the state all face similar challenges. We can help build collaboration among recreation providers, industry, and citizens to improve services that support families, communities, and the economy.

We must encourage citizen involvement in management of parks and recreation programs. We must also work to raise the awareness of recreation benefits with state and community policy makers. By working together, we can create a deeper sense of interdependency and build a strong advocacy base that promotes a unified voice for all parks, recreation, and public land in Montana without regard to jurisdiction or administrative boundaries.

GOAL D:

Foster strategic partnerships and an engaged constituency with visitors and key stakeholders that have a shared interest in the success of the Montana State Park system.

Target 1: Grow and strengthen formal partnerships.

- The Division will work closer with the Department of Commerce and the Office of Tourism, Montana Association of Counties, and Montana League of Cities and Towns to integrate initiatives related to the recreation and tourism industry.
- Park Managers will regularly engage with tourism representatives to further understanding of recreation challenges and identify opportunities for collaboration and economic growth.
- Park Managers will evaluate current partnerships and expand as appropriate, e.g. city and county governments, chambers of commerce, federal and state agencies, Tribal governments, health departments, educational institutions, heritage resources, service organizations, and non-profits.
- The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will cultivate a statewide non-profit Friends group with linkage to park-specific and program-specific groups. Enhance the dialogue, opportunity, and process for partnering with groups, including a Memorandum of Understanding with each group.

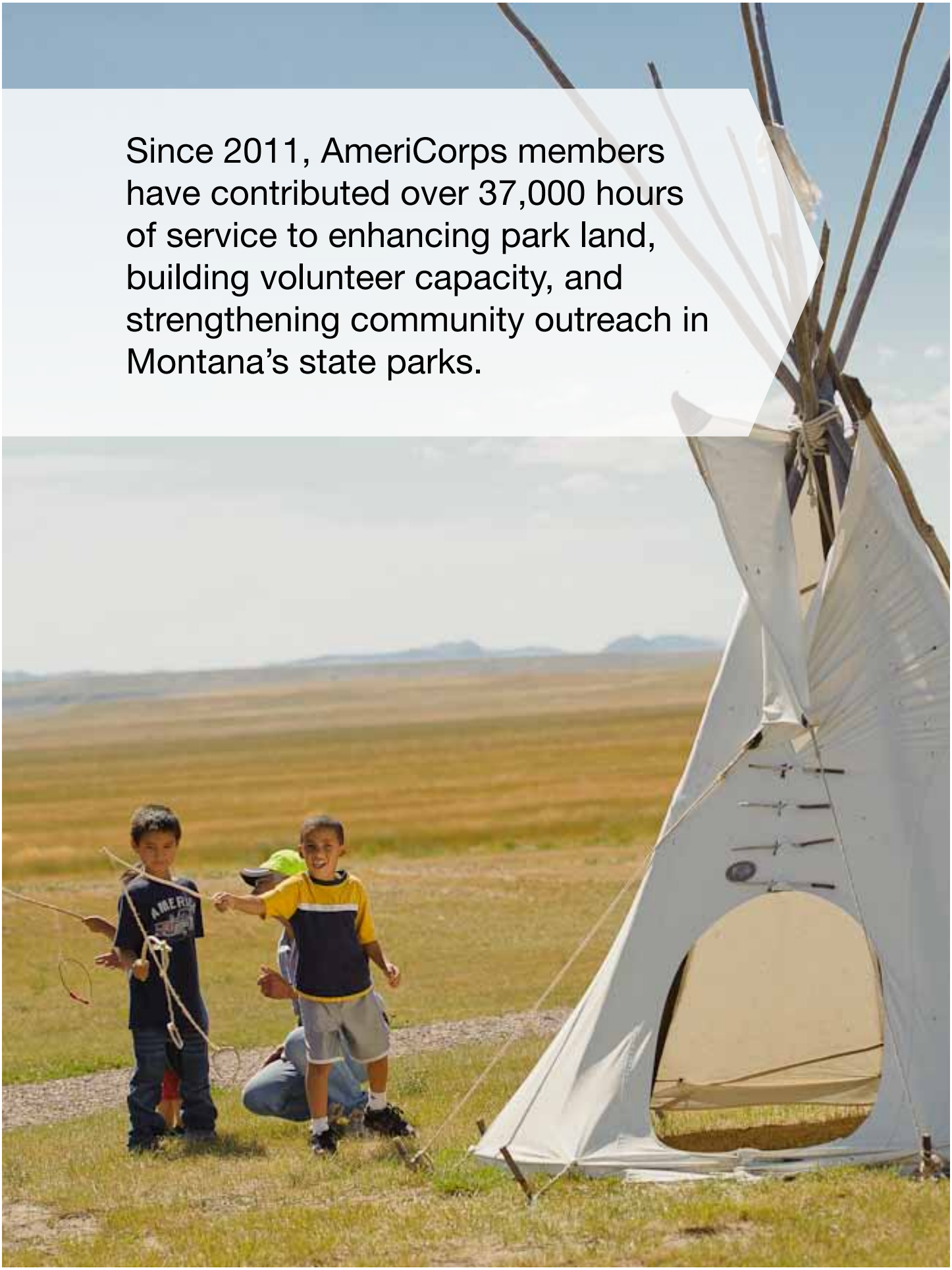
Target 2: Develop deeper connections with local communities through enriching and educational experiences.

- Park Managers will engage communities, local organizations and user groups to enhance state parks, including through concessionaires, citizen stewardship projects, citizen-led programming, and special community events.
- Park Managers will improve communication and information exchange with city and county leadership and park directors on management objectives, projects, and business development opportunities.
- Regional Park Managers will identify and pursue joint management partnerships of sites with cities and counties.

Target 3: Provide collective leadership with the Parks Board on statewide policy and management that advances parks and recreation across Montana.

- The Division will support the development of an annual congress with recreation providers and partners like the Montana Trails, Recreation & Parks Association to discuss initiatives and share guidance. Provide a progress report of SCORP accomplishments to the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board on an annual basis.
- The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board will actively participate in regional and state planning efforts by other agencies and providers, and engage with recreation planning on federal lands and at the national level. Support local citizens engaged in recreation discussions.
- Operations Program Staff will work with agency and organizational partners to promote parks and recreation planning principles for cities and counties that have limited resources and ability for planning.

Since 2011, AmeriCorps members have contributed over 37,000 hours of service to enhancing park land, building volunteer capacity, and strengthening community outreach in Montana's state parks.



"I can combine two of my personal favorite interests by visiting Montana's state parks: outdoor recreation and history. What is most valuable to me is the fun family experience we have at the parks."

- Whitehall listening session

E AWARENESS AND OUTREACH

Montana State Parks has taken great strides in effectively telling our story and raising awareness of the system. We have worked hard to cultivate volunteerism, engage communities, enhance educational opportunities, and promote participation in special events like National Public Lands Day and First Day Hikes.

Appreciation of our state park system is growing, which is reflected in increasing visitation and requests for a diversity of services and amenities. Over the next five years, we will work to better understand what our customers desire, like, and dislike with stronger customer engagement and feedback methods, including through traditional and digital media, newsletters, and reporting out on our successes.

Through branding efforts and statewide policy guidance, we will continue to tell our story. We will build awareness by connecting people to parks through consistent engagement at all levels. Working with local chambers of commerce, community leaders, elected officials, organizations, and governments will be a strategic focus over the next five years. By doing this, we can reach a broader audience and develop a deeper understanding for Montana's state parks, heritage sites and recreation programs.

GOAL E:

Heighten awareness and recognition for the Montana State Parks brand through consistent engagement.

Target 1: Reposition Montana State Parks to attract new visitors, retain and deepen connections with current users, and expand benefits to all Montanans.

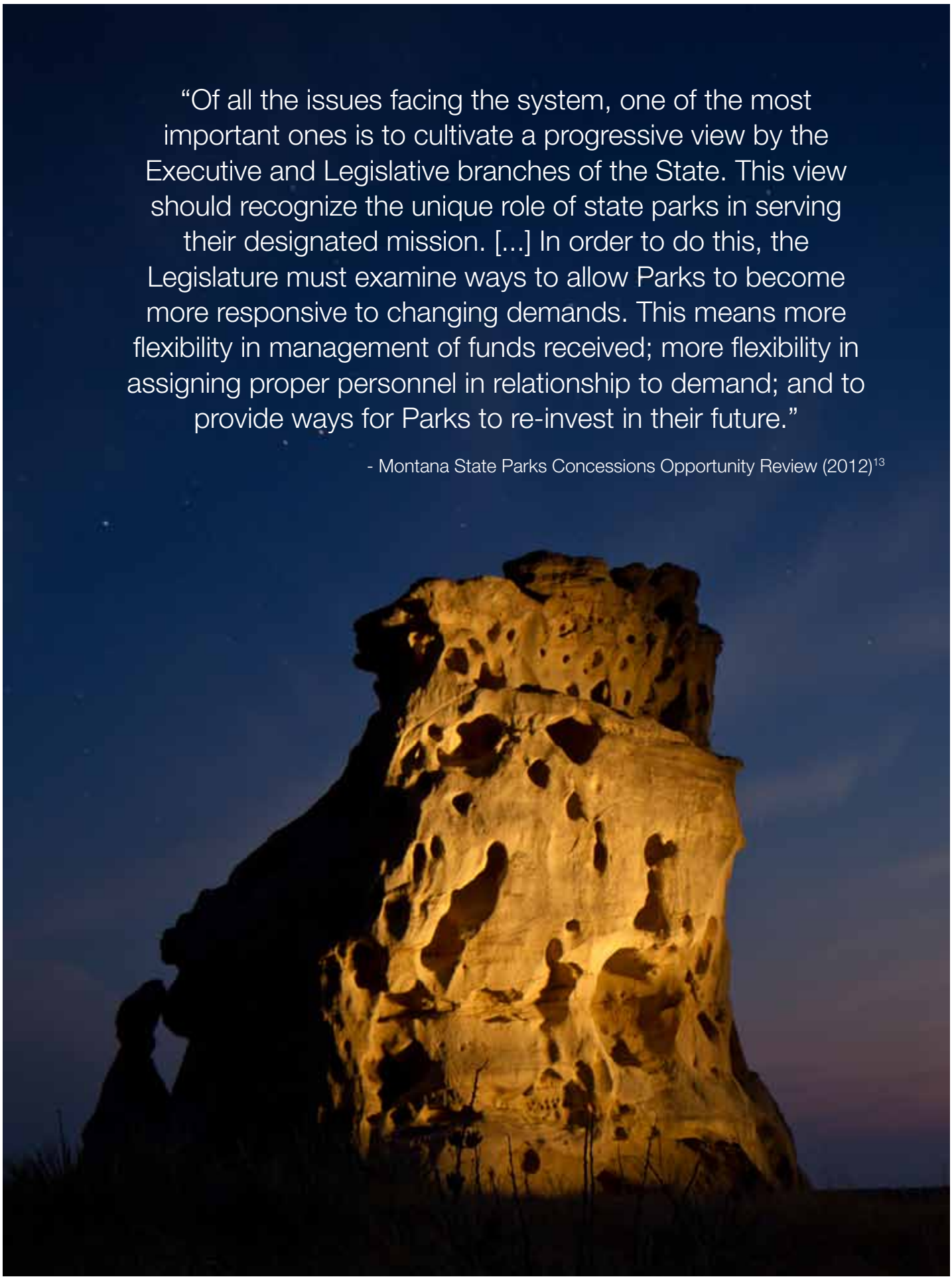
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff will develop a marketing plan and brand book that includes a strong campaign focused on the brand promise by 2016.
- Park Managers will increase visitation by 30% of 2014 levels with current resources or by 50% with development of new resources. Increase shoulder season use to maximize year-round recreation opportunities.
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff will enhance customer relationships through fresh and innovative methods, including social media, website, electronic newsletters, photography, and video. Highlight traditional outreach with attractive brochures, newspaper, radio, and television. Provide strategies for Field Staff to social network at the local level with relevant content.
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff will develop an online customer relationship and engagement system for visitors to easily and efficiently provide comments about park services and amenities by 2016.
- Park Managers & Operations Staff will expand outreach to attract and engage diverse populations through varied, innovative, and culturally relevant communication, including young adults, Native Americans, seniors, and people with disabilities.
- The Division will communicate the statewide benefits of recreation grant programs more effectively, and promote accomplishments with an annual report.

Target 2: Increase public and political awareness and appreciation of state parks, heritage sites and recreation programs.

- Park Managers will work with local chambers of commerce, community leaders, organizations, as well as local and Tribal governments to expand the awareness of park benefits and a deepen understanding of the challenges of the system.
- Park Managers and Regional Park Managers will foster relationships with local Legislators through regular communication and outreach, including field visits.
- Operations Program Staff and Park Managers will take the lead for the state on nationwide initiatives such as National Public Lands Day, First Day Hikes, and National Get Outdoors Day.
- Regional Park Managers will incentivize staff participation in community activities, and promote visitor centers at state parks as a community resource for educational and civic programs.
- Park Managers will engage local schools and universities to enhance educational experiences by using state parks as centers of learning.

Target 3: Expand partnerships for marketing and outreach efforts.

- Marketing & Communications Program Staff will continue to leverage the marketing budget through cross promotion with tourism partners, corporate sponsors, non-profit foundations, and private donors.
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff and Park Managers will partner with key agencies, tourism alliances, and chambers of commerce to coordinate signs and way-finding standards in communities.
- Marketing & Communications Program Staff and Park Managers will identify opportunities to expand campaigns in gateway communities both at home and outside Montana, including at welcome centers, rest stops, and border crossings.



"Of all the issues facing the system, one of the most important ones is to cultivate a progressive view by the Executive and Legislative branches of the State. This view should recognize the unique role of state parks in serving their designated mission. [...] In order to do this, the Legislature must examine ways to allow Parks to become more responsive to changing demands. This means more flexibility in management of funds received; more flexibility in assigning proper personnel in relationship to demand; and to provide ways for Parks to re-invest in their future."

- Montana State Parks Concessions Opportunity Review (2012)[13]

IMPLEMENTATION

This strategic plan is an aggressive approach to address the long-standing challenges of the parks system related to fiscal sustainability, resource needs, and awareness and advocacy. With over 25 years of analysis and recommendations leading into this planning effort, this five year strategy is key to changing the course of the park system and charting a new tomorrow.

It is also grounded in actions that are possible to achieve with the support and continued participation of partners and constituents. Concerted and coordinated efforts by many will ensure the long-term success of Montana State Parks, our recreation programs, and the overall recreation industry in Montana.

One of the first steps in the implementation process will be to prioritize the actions underlying each goal and target. Lead staff have been identified for each target, but each program must contribute to the implementation of the plan and recommendations for it to be successful.

We will also work to identify public, private, and non-profit partners that can assist further with implementation. Identification of more specific timelines will be prepared as part of performance plans as necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.

In addition, monitoring the progress of the direction outlined here will be an important part of the strategy. Monitoring helps to assure that our efforts and the public's feedback during the process conform to the plan, and that we are accomplishing what we intended to accomplish. We will actively analyze progress as a central component to implementation, and provide an updated report to the Montana State Parks & Recreation Board on an annual basis.

Together, with our partners and the citizens of Montana, we can effectively and strategically enhance the status of Montana's state parks, and work towards a common goal that raises the awareness of our parks, recreation, trails, and heritage resources throughout the state. By doing so, we can further the professionalism of the recreation industry, support local communities and the growing tourism economy, and ensure this important legacy continues for the next 75 years and more. ✧

ENDNOTES

1. The State Park Futures Committee I. 1990. The State Park System: Montana's Legacy—A New Growth Industry. A Report to Governor Stan Stephens and the 52nd Legislature. November 1990.

2. The State Park Futures Committee II. 2002. Report and Recommendations for the Montana State Parks System. A Report to Governor Judy Martz and the 58th Legislature. November 2002.

3. Environmental Quality Council. 2012. HJR 32: A Study of State Parks, Outdoor Recreation, and Heritage Resource Programs. A report to the 63rd Legislature. October 2012. Accessed at http://leg.mt.gov/content/Publications/Environmental/2013-state-parks.pdf.

4. Oschell, C. Ph.D and N. Nickerson Ph.D. 2012. Montana State Parks: Visitor Profile and Media Awareness. Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR). The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

5. Bureau of Business and Economic Research. 2010. 2010 Economic Impact Survey of Visitors to Montana State Parks. The University of Montana, Missoula, MT.

6. Calculated using CPI Inflation Calculator, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm

7. Montana State Parks. 2013. Creating a Vibrant Future for Montana's Outdoor Recreation Heritage. Montana 2014-2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Accessed at http://stateparks.mt.gov/about-us/scorp.html.

8. Environmental Quality Council. 2012.

9. Bud Surles Consulting Group, LLC. 2012. Montana State Parks Concessions Opportunity Review.

10. Montana State Parks. 2014. Community Listening Sessions Summary Executive Summary. June 2014. Accessed at http://stateparks.mt.gov/about-us/parksData.html.

11. Bureau of Business and Economic Research. 2010. 2010 Economic Impact Survey of Visitors to Montana State Parks. The University of Montana, Missoula, MT. Accessed at http://stateparks.mt.gov/about-us/parksData.html.

12. Bureau of Business and Economic Research. 2010.

13. Bud Surles Consulting Group. 2012.

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT

In December 2013, the Parks Board requested the Department engage the citizens of Montana through the development of an updated strategic plan. The plan will serve to guide the state park system and recreation programs. Key assessments in the planning process include:

- ✧ Clarifying mandates, mission and core values;
- ✧ Assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the park system and program;
- ✧ Addressing the capacity to improve funding, advocacy, and resources;
- ✧ Gathering informed input from staff, elected officials, key stakeholders and organizations;
- ✧ Engaging the public in a meaningful discussion about the future of the state park system.

A brief summary of the internal and external forums follows. Updates and additional discussions were held at the Parks Board meetings throughout 2014. Documents are provided on the Montana State Parks website.

Staff Survey

Montana State Parks' full-time and long-term seasonal staff were asked to respond to an online survey to gauge their perceptions on issues and topics related to the strategic plan update; identify key priorities within the Division; understand the outlook for the future; ascertain important internal considerations such as staff resources and confidence; and provide suggestions for improving the Division and programs.

Top three Division-wide needs:

1. Adequate funding and staffing resources
2. Enhance visitor experiences
3. Improve resource conditions

Legislative Survey

An online survey was sent to 149 members of the Legislature to understand the perceptions of elected officials and the political context and awareness of the Montana State Park system. Thirty-five surveys were completed, giving a 23% response rate.

Top three priorities:

1. Address backlog of capital and maintenance needs
2. Sell, transfer or donate lands that do not meet the Montana State Parks' mission
3. Develop revenue streams

Important attributes of the state park system:
Affordable, Accessible, Clean and Well-Maintained

Board Retreat

The Montana State Parks & Recreation Board and senior leadership from the Division participated in a facilitated retreat to set goals for the Board to address in their first year. The Board discussed the role and purpose of the state park system, current challenges in funding and operations, and opportunities in policy, regulation and legislation to improve Montana State Parks and recreation programs.

Three key focus areas:

1. Diversified and sustainable funding
2. Existing and new strategic partnerships
3. Build engaged constituents

Community Listening Sessions

In April, Montana State Parks hosted 8 community listening sessions around the state, facilitated by the MSU Extension Local Government Center. Stakeholders were identified by field staff for each meeting, and invitations were sent from the Division Administrator. The general public was also invited through a press release issued in advance of the meetings.

Over 117 people attended the sessions and participated in discussion forums on the values, challenges, and opportunities for the future of Montana's state park and recreation programs. While this is not representative of the Montana population, discussions across the state helped identify major themes, values, concerns, and opportunities for improvement.

The meetings identified top strategies prioritized by participants that the Executive and Legislative branches should consider pursuing to sustain the system and increase public investment, and top strategies to enhance the system.

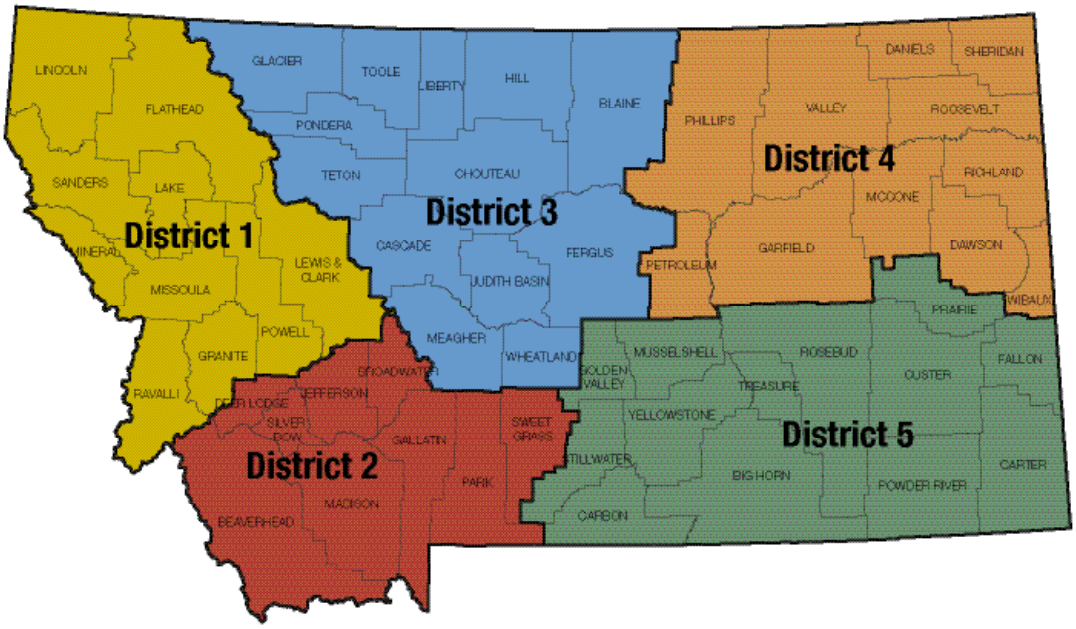
Strategies to sustain the system:

- Develop revenue streams
- Pursue public-private partnerships
- Address the backlog of capital maintenance needs
- Pursue state General Fund allocation
- Reduce the size of the state park system

Strategies to enhance the system:

- Build community partnerships
- Develop more recreation resources and services
- Expand range of opportunities
- Utilize focused marketing and social media
- Enhance universal access

STATE PARKS & RECREATION BOARD



It is the purpose of the Department, the Parks Division, and the State Parks and Recreation Board to conserve the scenic, historic, archaeologic, scientific, and recreational resources of Montana, provide for their use and enjoyment, and contribute to the cultural, recreational, and economic life of Montanans and their health (MCA 23-1-101, 23-1-111). The Board's duties include:

Policy, Direction & Rulemaking:

- Management, protection, conservation, and preservation of these properties, lands, and waters and their appropriate role relative to tourism and the economic health of Montana
- Coordinate, integrate, promote, and further opportunities for education and recreation, including but not limited to camping, hiking, snowmobiling, off-highway vehicle use, horseback riding, mountain biking, boating, and swimming
- Establish rules for use of these properties and lands in the interest of public health, public safety, public welfare, and protection of property and public resources in regulating recreation

Coordination & Engagement:

- Work with local, state, and federal agencies to evaluate, integrate, coordinate, and promote recreational opportunities statewide
- Encourage citizen involvement in management planning for state parks and other properties, lands, and waters
- Work with the Fish & Wildlife Commission to maintain hunting and angling opportunities on these lands and waters

Review & Approval Authority:

- All acquisitions and transfers of properties, lands, and waters by the Parks Division
- Parks Division budget prior to transmittal to the office of budget and program planning
- Construction projects with estimated cost of more than $5000

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Montana State Parks is a Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
1420 E. 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59601 | 406-444-3750