

ISSUE 37: TOURISM

Changes from the Draft to the Final EIS

The visitor and expenditure information in this section has been updated from 1998 to 2005 data using the latest Montana Tourism and Recreation reports

Introduction

A total of 3.8 million nonresident travel groups, generally couples or families, visited Montana in 1998. Eighty four percent (84%) of these visited during the summer, spring, and fall and 16% visited during the winter according to the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (McMahon 1998). By 2005 this number had risen to 4.3 million groups according to the Institute (Nickerson 2005). The top five recreation activities of visitors are viewing wildlife, hiking/walking, viewing natural features, relaxing, and driving for pleasure. Except for hiking and walking, these are all passive activities. This issue was determined not to be significant to the Travel Plan decision for these reasons:

- 1) Most non-resident visitors come because of the attraction of Yellowstone Park and surrounding tourist communities.
- 2) The seven Travel Plan alternatives would not likely affect the top five recreation activities identified above.

Discussion

A total of 3.8 million nonresident travel groups, generally couples or families, visited Montana in 1998. By 2005 this number had risen to 4.3 million groups according to the Institute (Nickerson 2005). According to the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research 84% of these visited during the summer, spring, and fall and 16% visited during the winter. They spent more than \$1.5 billion in direct expenditures in Montana while their average length of stay was 4.3 days. Data gathered for the year 2002 indicate that the average travel group spent about \$115 per day during their stay. Nickerson (2005) shows that by 2005 the expenditures had increased to \$2.1 billion.

Nonresident visitor groups to Gallatin County totaled 848,000 in 1998 and they spent an average of five days there. They spent \$302 million in direct expenditures such as lodging, meals, transportation and retail sales. The majority (71%) stayed in motels or hotels, 24% stayed with family or friends and 15% reported staying in either private or public campgrounds. Winter visitors, who accounted for 32% of total activity, stayed longer and spent more than summer visitors. Bozeman accounted for 42% of spending in Gallatin County (ibid.).

A 2001 visitor survey (Institute for Tourism and Recreation, Nonresident Visitor Survey, Norma Nickerson, 2001) found that, of people who had visited Yellowstone National Park in the summer and subsequently visited other areas of Montana, major activities were wildlife watching, shopping, day hiking, visiting historic sites, picnicking and camping, in that order. The major identified attractions were Yellowstone Park, mountains and forests, open and uncrowded space, wildlife, rivers and lakes.

See Issue 5: Social and Economic Impacts, Chapter 3 for precise information on the impact of non-resident visitation to the Gallatin National Forest. The National Visitor Use Monitoring Project of the USDA Forest Service (2004) indicates that the Gallatin National Forest received 1.9 million visits during 2003. Approximately 55% of the respondents could be identified as local residents and 84% indicated that their sole purpose of their visit was to recreate on the Gallatin. Non-resident visitors to Montana and Gallatin County are less likely to make up a very large proportion of the visitors to the Gallatin National Forest except incidentally along the corridors that lead away from Yellowstone National Park.

General Effects

Tourism is a multi-million dollar industry in Montana, especially the regions surrounding Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. In the Gallatin National Forest area, many of the attractions that lend themselves to tourism (the mountains, rivers, forests, wildlife, and open space) are not significantly affected by the decisions to be made in the Gallatin Travel Plan. Many of the activities that visitors report (watching wildlife, picnicking, day hiking) would not be changed by the Travel Plan. For a complete discussion of recreation activities see Issue 16: Recreation in Chapter 2.

Alternatives 1 and 2 are most like the current condition and would represent no change. The National Visitor Use Monitoring Project reports that the most used facilities on the Gallatin are the roads and trails. The top five recreation activities of visitors are viewing wildlife, hiking/walking, viewing natural features, relaxing and driving for pleasure. Except for hiking and walking, these are all passive activities that would not be affected differently by any of the alternatives. One would expect that these activities would remain the most reported by visitors over the next 10 to 15 years.

Tourism continues to be a major economic activity in Montana and is expected to increase in the future. Peoples' vacation and leisure habits are affected by factors outside normal land management decisions on a particular National Forest. However, a National Forest such as the Gallatin that is located in a setting of tourist activity, will be somewhat affected by the choices tourists make.

A major decision made by Yellowstone National Park on snowmobiling could affect decisions by a major sector of winter tourists who come to this area to snowmobile. The effect would be most dramatic in the communities of West Yellowstone and Cooke City. If tourists do not come to the area because of restrictions in Yellowstone Park, there may be less of an increase in snowmobiling on the Forest. If tourists continue to come here with those restrictions in place, then increased use on the Gallatin Forest could be expected.

Consistency with Laws, Regulations, Policy, and Federal, Regional, State and Local Land Use Plans (including the Forest Plan)

There is no law or regulation that requires the Forest Service to address Tourism in its plans.