



# 2012 ANNUAL VISITATION REPORT



2012

## Montana State Parks

Montana State Parks had over 2.0 million visitors in 2012. Statewide visitation is up 7% from 2011 and up 10% from 2008. Region 5 had the highest overall visitation in 2012 as well as the largest increase in visitation from 2011. Giant Springs State Park had the highest visitation of all state parks at 293,000 visitors, while Lake Elmo State Park had the biggest increase in visitors with 80,000 more visitors in 2012 than 2011. Non-resident use and overnight use increased statewide in 2012.

# 2012 Annual Visitation Report

**JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2012**

The following is a summary of Montana State Parks' 2012 annual visitation, as well as comparisons with 2011 data, and visitation trends.

**Total State Parks visitation for 2012 is 2,003,875 visitors, up **7%** from 2011.**

3-Year Trend (2010 to 2012); State Parks visitation is up **1%**.

5-Year Trend (2008 to 2012): State Parks visitation is up **10%**.

10-Year Trend (2003 to 2012): State Parks visitation is up **25%**.

## STATEWIDE VISITATION

In 2012, Montana State Parks had over 2.0 million visitors, on par with 2009 as the most visitors to State Parks in a single year. After a modest decline in visitation in 2010 and 2011, statewide visitation increased again in 2012. Visitation increased 7% over 2011 levels, 1% over 2010 levels, and 10% over 2008 levels (Table 1). Visitation is 25% higher than it was 10 years ago.

The busiest month in 2012 was July with 446,495 total visitors, which was also the busiest month on record over the last five years. On average, there were about 166,805 visitors per month in 2012 (Figure 1).

**In 2012, Montana's visitation trended upward and surpassed 2.0 million visitors, making it the second busiest year in Montana State Parks history.**

Year	Total Visits
2008	1,815,828
2009	2,031,121
2010	1,976,196
2011	1,875,803
<b>2012</b>	<b>2,003,875</b>

Figure 1. Visitation by Month, 2012.

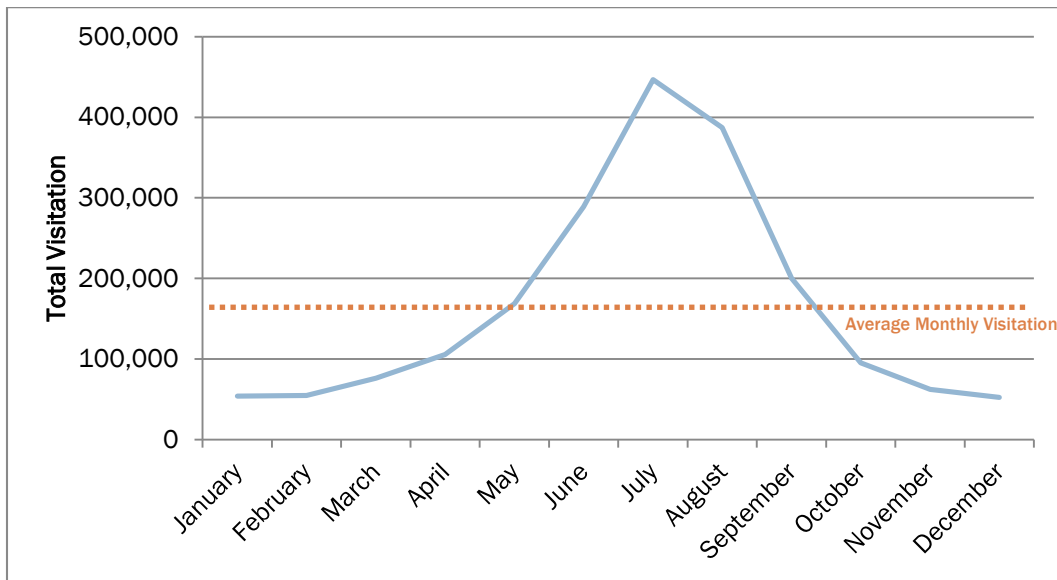
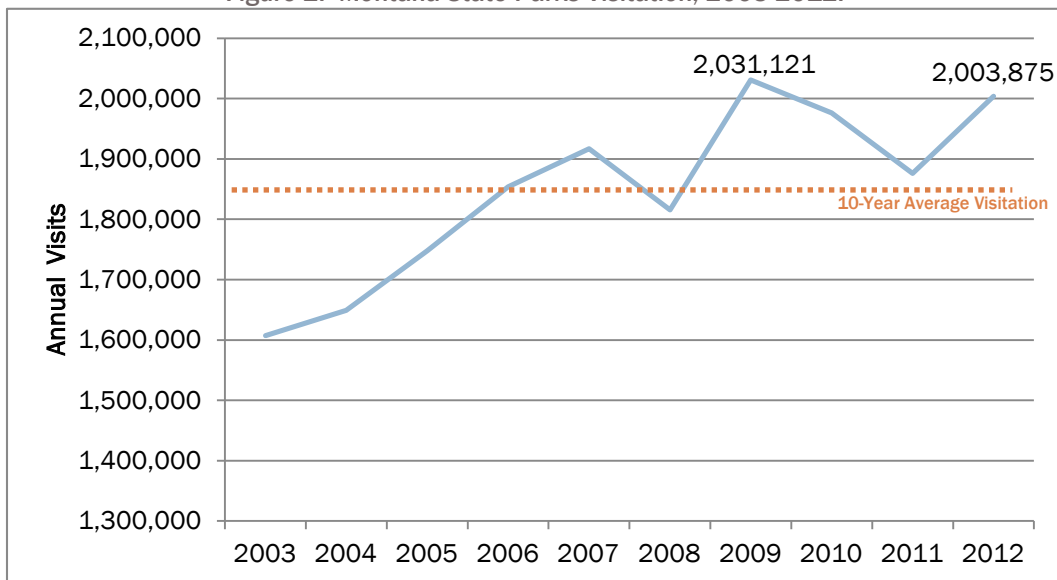


Figure 2. Montana State Parks Visitation, 2003-2012.



## REGIONAL VISITATION

Region 5 had the highest visitation with over 456,000 visitors, followed by Region 1 with over 442,000 visitors (Table 2).

Regions 1, 2, 3, and 5 saw increases in visitation from 2011. Regions 2, 3, and 5 had significant increases over 10%, with Region 5 having the largest increase at 16%.

Region 4 decreased by 7% from 2011 levels, while visitation in Region 7 stayed relatively the same.

Region	Total Visits	Group Size & Walk-In	Resident %	Non-Res %	Day Use %	Overnight Visit %*	2011 to 2012 % Change
1	442,627	23,343	77%	23%	84%	16%*	7%
2	243,104	8,901	73%	27%	70%	30%*	12%
3	295,823	9,799	79%	21%	85%	15%	13%
4	365,732	4,136	89%	11%	96%	4%	-7%
5	456,240	14,208	88%	12%	97%	3%	16%
7	200,349	1,185	75%	25%	72%	28%	0%
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,003,875</i>	<i>61,572</i>	<i>77%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>83%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>7%</i>

\*Overnight visitation is based on estimation. With the new campsite reservation system, this data will begin to improve. Based on the reservation system data for 2012—which is not yet integrated into this report—Region 1 had the most overnight stays.

Region 1 had the most groups, walk-in and bike-in visitors, followed by Region 5. Region 4 had the highest visitation by residents, while Region 2 had the highest visitation of non-residents in the regions. About three-quarters of visitation to each region was day use, with Region 4 and 5 having the highest percentage of visitor day use. Conversely, Region 2 had the highest percentage of overnight use, followed by Region 7.

Overall, the majority of park visitors in 2012 were resident day-users.

## Visitation by State Parks

- Region 1:** **Wayfarers** had the highest visitation in Region 1 at 112,000 visitors. From 2011 to 2012, **Les Mason** had the largest increase in visitation at 22%, followed by **Lake Mary Ronan** at 20%. North Shore had a 28% increase in visitation, however the actual number of visitors only increased by 40 people. Visitation to Wild Horse Island decreased by 10%.
- Region 2:** **Salmon Lake** and **Placid Lake** had the highest visitation in Region 2 with over 45,000 visitors at each park. **Salmon Lake** had the largest increase from 2011 to 2012 at 32%. Visitation to Lost Creek decreased by 19%.
- Region 3:** **Spring Meadow** had the highest visitation in Region 3 at over 102,000 visitors, as well as the largest increase from 2011 to 2012 at 31%. Visitation at Elkhorn decreased by 34%.
- Region 4:** **Giant Springs** had the highest visitation at almost 293,000 visitors, the most in the state. From 2011 to 2012, **Sluice Boxes** had the largest increases in visitation at 21%, followed by **Smith River** at 19%. Although Giant Springs had the most visitors, it still decreased in visitation by 10%, while First Peoples Buffalo Jump decreased in visitation by 11%.
- Region 5:** **Lake Elmo** had the highest visitation in Region 5 at 215,000 visitors, as well as the largest increase from 2011 to 2012 at 60%.
- Region 7:** **Makoshika** had the highest visitation in Region 7 at 73,000 visitors. From 2011 to 2012, visitation at **Brush Lake** more than doubled from 4,000 to 9,000 visitors. **Hell Creek** increased by 36%, while a number of parks decreased more than 10% in visitation, including Tongue River Reservoir, Rosebud Battlefield, and Medicine Rocks.

**For complete data on individual park visitation, see the appendix.**

## Visitation Trends, 2008 to 2012

From 2010 to 2012, Regions 1, 2, 3, and 5 had increases in visitation, with Region 5 having the largest increase over the 3-year period at 24% (Table 3). Regions 4 and 7 decreased in visitation.

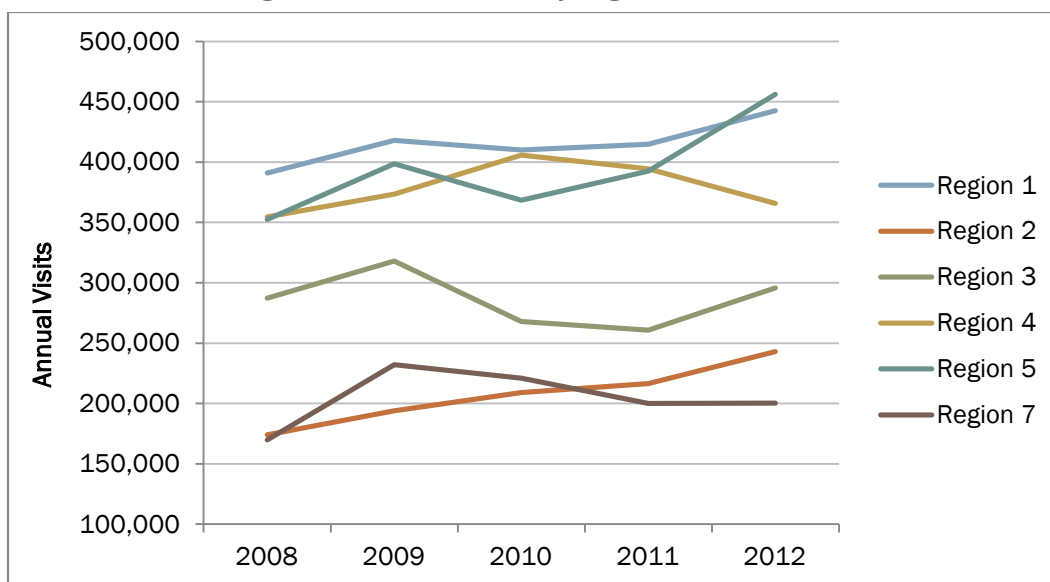
From 2008 to 2012, all regions increased in visitation, with Region 2 having the largest increase over the 5-year period at 40%. Region 5 also had a large increase at 29%.

Table 3. Regional Visitation Trends, 2008-2012							
Region	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2010-2012 % Change	2008-2012 % Change
1	391,037	417,993	409,957	414,717	442,627	8%	13%
2	174,105	194,048	209,033	216,443	243,104	16%	40%
3	287,417	317,934	268,038	260,860	295,823	10%	3%
4	354,650	373,473	405,726	394,277	365,732	-10%	3%
5	352,383	398,691	368,306	392,486	456,240	24%	29%
7	169,768	232,262	221,031	200,082	200,349	-9%	18%

Over the five-year period from 2008 to 2012, Regions 1, 2, and 5 peaked in visitation in 2012 (Figure 5). Regions 3 and 7 peaked in 2009, and Region 4 peaked in 2010. All regions increased in visitation from 2008 to 2009. Since 2009, the regions have experienced both increases and decreases in visitation:

- Region 2 is the only region that has continued to steadily increase in visitation since 2009.
- Region 4 continued to increase through 2010, then began to decline in visitation.
- Regions 1 and 5 decreased in visitation from 2009 to 2010, before ticking back up in visitation to 5-year highs in 2012.
- Region 3 continued to decrease in visitation in 2011 before increasing in 2012.
- Region 7 visitation decreased in 2011 and remained stable in 2012.

Figure 3. Visitation Trends by Region, 2008 to 2012



## Residency and Use Trends, 2008 to 2012

Since 2008, the resident-to-non-resident visitor ratio statewide has changed wherein the percent of non-resident visitors is increasing, particularly in Regions 2, 4, and 7 (Figure 4). Related, overnight camping has been slightly increasing throughout the state, particularly in Regions 2 and 4 (Figure 5).

In general, when non-resident visitation and overnight use increases, statewide visitation numbers are higher. This trend is evident in the residency and use data of the last five years.

Figure 4. Non-Resident Visitation, 2008 to 2012.

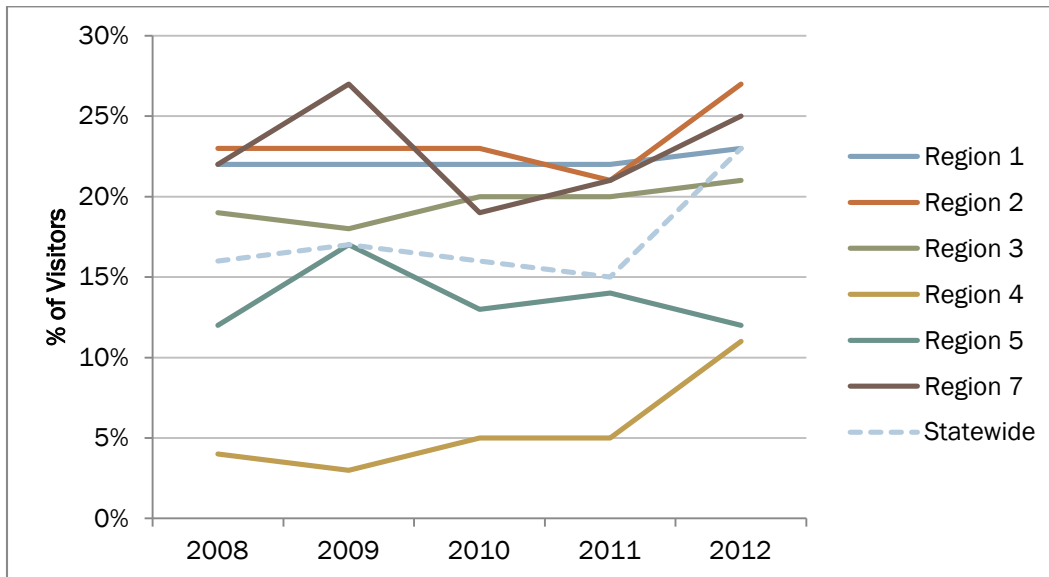
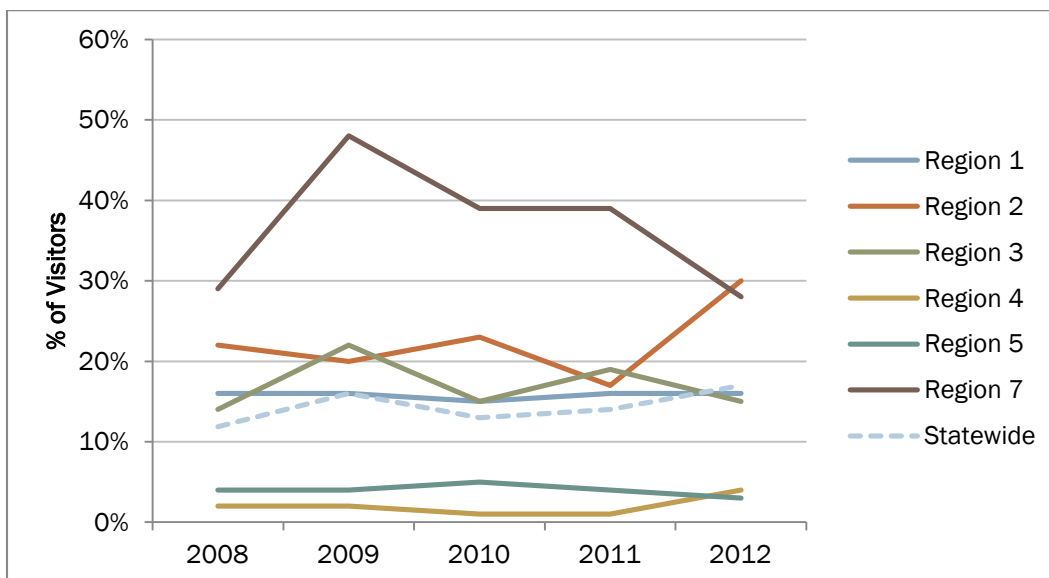


Figure 5. Overnight Use, 2008 to 2012.



## APPENDIX. PARKS VISITATION TABLES

# 2012 Montana State Parks Visitation Estimates by Park

Calendar year, by Region

Region	Park	Total Visits	Resident %	Non-Res %	Day Use %	Overnight Visit %	2011 Total Visits	2011-12 % Change
1	Big Arm	35,876	68%	32%	59%	41%	36,585	-2%
1	Finley Point	19,611	76%	24%	71%	29%	19,836	-1%
1	Lake Mary Ronan	27,435	86%	14%	72%	28%	22,916	20%
1	Les Mason	11,518	95%	5%	100%	0%	9,417	22%
1	Logan	20,783	82%	18%	61%	39%	19,735	5%
1	Lone Pine	66,671	89%	11%	100%	0%	66,254	1%
1	North Shore	198	100%	0%	100%	0%	155	28%
1	Thompson Falls	11,856	63%	37%	68%	32%	10,024	18%
1	Wayfarers	112,149	76%	24%	87%	13%	103,756	8%
1	West Shore	31,613	72%	28%	89%	11%	26,554	19%
1	Whitefish	63,630	78%	22%	86%	14%	57,693	10%
1	Wild Horse Island	17,029	62%	38%	100%	0%	18,905	-10%
1	Yellow Bay	24,258	80%	20%	95%	5%	22,887	6%
2	Anaconda Smoke Stack	9,544	53%	47%	100%	0%	9,978	-4%
2	Beavertail Hill	15,301	63%	37%	22%	78%	16,457	-7%
2	Council Grove	33,394	83%	17%	100%	0%	29,951	11%
2	Fish Creek*	5,485	94%	6%	100%	0%	-	-
2	Fort Owen	4,100	67%	33%	100%	1%	3,792	8%
2	Frenchtown Pond	34,937	91%	9%	100%	0%	32,788	7%
2	Lost Creek	10,571	57%	43%	79%	21%	13,003	-19%
2	Painted Rocks	13,396	74%	26%	62%	38%	11,624	15%
2	Placid Lake	45,446	58%	42%	42%	58%	41,523	9%
2	Salmon Lake	45,996	78%	22%	47%	53%	34,882	32%
2	Travelers' Rest	24,936	71%	29%	100%	0%	21,933	14%
3	Bannack	32,957	62%	38%	97%	3%	31,328	5%
3	Black Sandy	55,809	94%	6%	50%	50%	56,345	-1%
3	Clark's Lookout	8,382	76%	24%	100%	0%	7,692	9%
3	Elkhorn	1,520	88%	12%	100%	0%	2,318	-34%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	64,765	50%	50%	80%	20%	58,789	10%
3	Madison Buffalo Jump	4,501	74%	26%	100%	0%	3,809	18%
3	Missouri Headwaters	25,364	72%	28%	89%	11%	22,118	15%
3	Spring Meadow	102,525	95%	5%	100%	0%	78,460	31%
4	Ackley Lake	26,160	98%	2%	90%	10%	25,411	3%
4	First Peoples Buffalo Jump	15,291	68%	32%	100%	27%	17,192	-11%
4	Giant Springs	292,725	90%	10%	100%	0%	324,495	-10%
4	Sluice Boxes	15,231	96%	4%	99%	1%	12,566	21%
4	Smith River	4,515	74%	26%	0%	100%	3,803	19%
4	Tower Rock	11,810	69%	31%	100%	34%	10,810	9%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	36,195	79%	21%	100%	0%	33,772	7%
5	Cooney	134,556	89%	11%	89%	11%	146,388	-8%
5	Lake Elmo	215,041	97%	3%	100%	0%	134,300	60%
5	Pictograph Cave	51,283	67%	33%	100%	0%	56,313	-9%
5	Prairie Dog Town	11,055	42%	58%	100%	0%	12,694	-13%
5	Yellowstone River	8,110	76%	24%	100%	0%	9,020	-10%
7	Brush Lake	9,001	55%	45%	77%	23%	4,060	122%
7	Hell Creek	32,370	74%	26%	30%	70%	23,796	36%
7	Makoshika	72,962	94%	6%	97%	3%	66,936	9%
7	Medicine Rocks	11,473	82%	18%	76%	24%	13,411	-14%
7	Pirogue Island	13,238	95%	5%	100%	1%	13,667	-3%
7	Rosebud Battlefield	5,396	14%	86%	100%	0%	6,616	-18%
7	Tongue River Reservoir	55,909	53%	47%	55%	45%	71,596	-22%

\*Fish Creek State Park began tracking visitation estimates in 2012.



# 2012 Montana State Parks Visitation Estimates by Park

Calendar year, organized by Total Visits

Region	Park	Total Visits	Resident %	Non-Res %	Day Use %	Overnight Visit %	2011 Total Visits	2011-12 % Change
4	Giant Springs	292,725	90%	10%	100%	0%	324,495	-10%
5	Lake Elmo	215,041	97%	3%	100%	0%	134,300	60%
5	Cooney	134,556	89%	11%	89%	11%	146,388	-8%
1	Wayfarers	112,149	76%	24%	87%	13%	103,756	8%
3	Spring Meadow	102,525	95%	5%	100%	0%	78,460	31%
7	Makoshika	72,962	94%	6%	97%	3%	66,936	9%
1	Lone Pine	66,671	89%	11%	100%	0%	66,254	1%
3	Lewis & Clark Caverns	64,765	50%	50%	80%	20%	58,789	10%
1	Whitefish	63,630	78%	22%	86%	14%	57,693	10%
7	Tongue River Reservoir	55,909	53%	47%	55%	45%	71,596	-22%
3	Black Sandy	55,809	94%	6%	50%	50%	56,345	-1%
5	Pictograph Cave	51,283	67%	33%	100%	0%	56,313	-9%
2	Salmon Lake	45,996	78%	22%	47%	53%	34,882	32%
2	Placid Lake	45,446	58%	42%	42%	58%	41,523	9%
5	Chief Plenty Coups	36,195	79%	21%	100%	0%	33,772	7%
1	Big Arm	35,876	68%	32%	59%	41%	36,585	-2%
2	Frenchtown Pond	34,937	91%	9%	100%	0%	32,788	7%
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4	Ackley Lake	26,160	98%	2%	90%	10%	25,411	3%
3	Missouri Headwaters	25,364	72%	28%	89%	11%	22,118	15%
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3	Elkhorn	1,520	88%	12%	100%	0%	2,318	-34%
1	North Shore	198	100%	0%	100%	0%	155	28%

\*Fish Creek State Park began tracking visitation estimates in 2012.

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Calendar year, organized by Percent Change

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