



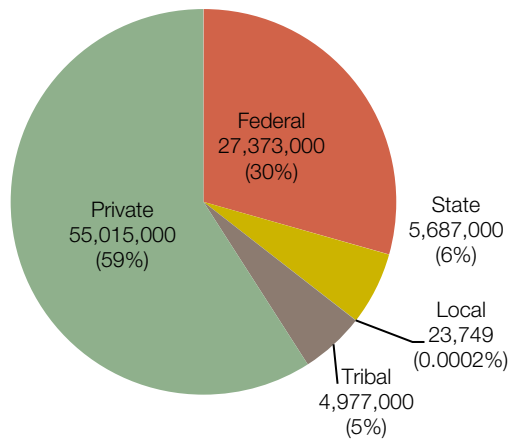
## CHAPTER 2

# SUPPLY AND PREFERENCES OF OUTDOOR RECREATION RESOURCES

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Public lands in Montana are more than a scenic backdrop. They are valuable and diverse resources that contribute to local and state economies, characterize communities, provide abundant recreation opportunities, provide critical wildlife habitat, and greatly enhance the quality of life of our residents while also drawing more than 10 million visitors to the state each year. There are eight federal and state agencies that manage recreation lands in Montana, in addition to city, county, and Tribal lands. The federal agencies include (in order of most acreage): U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and Army Corps of Engineers. State agencies include Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (which includes Montana State Parks), and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

FIG 3. LAND OWNERSHIP IN MONTANA



Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program.

According to the Montana Natural Heritage Program,<sup>1</sup> public land ownership makes up 36% of Montana's land base, while almost 60% of Montana is in private ownership and 5% is Tribal lands. Federal agencies manage 30% of the land base in Montana, or about 27 million acres. State lands, including Montana State Parks, make up 6% of Montana. Cities and counties account for less than 1% of all lands in Montana. Lands specifically managed for recreation at the local level is unknown, but it can be assumed that it is still smaller than the total city and county land base. In total, Montanans and visitors enjoy just over 38 million acres of public land open to recreation, which equates to about 38 acres of public land per resident. *Appendix B* provides a complete listing of public lands by county.

State land makes up 15% of the public land base, and is primarily managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) and Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). Montana State Parks, a division of FWP, manages 54 state parks totaling 46,000 acres, which is a very small percentage of the total public land base. FWP also manages 84 wildlife management areas that cover over more than 365,000 acres across Montana and over 350 fishing access sites that provide access to Montana's scenic and plentiful rivers and streams for angling, boating, rafting, and other recreation opportunities. In addition, DNRC manages over 5.1 million acres of state school trust lands that provides access to recreation activities with a permit.

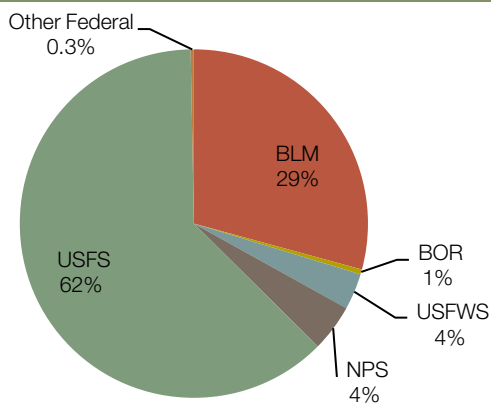
Among the Rocky Mountain States,<sup>2</sup> Montana has the second lowest amount of federal public land. Colorado has the lowest, while Nevada has the highest. Proportionate to the area of the state, federal land is 30% of the land base in Montana, while Nevada, for example, is approximately 84% federal land.

When looking at public land ownership in Montana in more detail, federal agencies manage about 72% of all public land. The Forest Service manages the most federal land at 62%, or more than 17 million acres. The Bureau of Land Management has the second highest public land base at 29% of federal lands, followed by the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Bureau of Reclamation, Army Corps of Engineers, and other federal agencies make up the remaining 2% of federal land base. Tribal lands also manage lands for public recreation, however it is not known how much acreage is open for public recreation separate from all lands under Tribal ownership.

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Land Management. Public Land Statistics. [http://www.blm.gov/public\\_land\\_statistics/](http://www.blm.gov/public_land_statistics/).

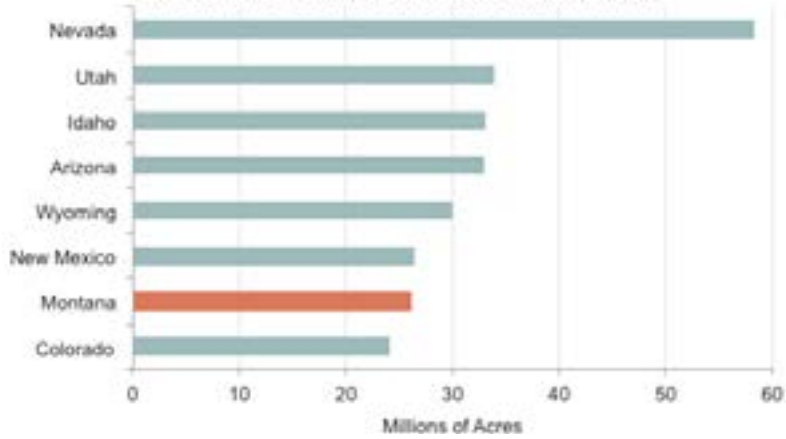
<sup>1</sup> Montana Natural Heritage Program. Land Management Mapping. <http://mtnhp.org/stew.asp>

FIG 4. FEDERAL LAND OWNERSHIP IN MONTANA



Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program.

FIG 5. FEDERAL PUBLIC LANDS IN ROCKY MTN STATES



Source: Bureau of Land Management, Public Land Statistics.

# SUPPLY OF OUTDOOR RECREATION RESOURCES

As stated, there are close to 38 million acres of public land in Montana, with approximately 27 million acres managed by Federal agencies. A complete inventory of recreation facilities, miles of trails, and other opportunities is not available across agencies. As part of the SCORP planning process, a survey of recreation providers was administered to understand the current supply of recreation facilities, including an assessment of the condition, as well as develop an understanding of needs, major issues, and funding priorities.

## FACILITY AND NATURAL RESOURCE RECREATION AREA NEEDS SURVEY

Montana State Parks partnered with the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research (ITRR) at the University of Montana to develop and distribute a survey to public land management agencies.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of the study was to understand the quantity and quality of outdoor recreation facilities and areas, and the future recreation needs from the perspective of managers.

A survey of local, state, federal, school, and Tribal managers was conducted in the fall of 2012. A total of 396 managers were contacted via email and asked to participate in an online survey. A total of 109 managers responded resulting in a response rate of 27%.<sup>4</sup> Of the responses, 40% were from school districts, followed by 21% from state managers, and 17% from federal managers. Requests were sent to recreation managers at the district/regional levels to eliminate duplication, so not every park/unit manager got a survey invitation, thus limiting the pool of responses.

In Montana, many cities and counties do not have a formal recreation department, which may account for the low response rate in these categories. In this instance, survey invitations were also sent to the planning/public works department that manage parks and open space and/or the school district, which in many rural communities is the main source of recreation and open space in the community. Thus, it is logical that most of the responses came from the school districts. This is an important distinction and should be taken with caution, as many facilities that were included in the survey, like equestrian trails, motorized off-road trails, and hunting areas, are not present on school property. Thus, the results could potentially be influenced by what is available on school grounds. The following sections provide an overview of the responses.

<sup>3</sup> Metcalf, E.C.; and Nickerson N.P. 2013. Montana SCORP: Facility and Natural Resource Recreation Area Needs: Facility Manager Responses 2012. (Research 2013-3). Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, College of Forestry and Conservation, The University of Montana.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted this is a low response rate, thus making it difficult to generalize the findings to the state of Montana. Still, the survey provides a useful glimpse into the status of recreation, the issues land managers are facing, the kinds of policies that influence decision-making.

## ASSESSMENT OF RECREATION FACILITY QUANTITY AND QUALITY

Land managers were asked about the quantity and quality of various outdoor recreation facilities and natural areas. Quantity was measured by asking respondents if there was an adequate number of facilities, or if facilities should be increased. Respondents were also given the option to indicate if they don't have the facility but would like it or don't have the facility and don't need the facility. Quality was measured by asking the respondent to report if the facility was in poor, fair, good or very good condition.

For land-based facilities, recreation managers indicated there is an adequate quantity of equestrian trails, motorized off-road trails, and scenic byways. For water-based facilities, there is an adequate quantity of fishing areas, non-motorized boating areas, motorized boating areas, and outdoor pools. Managers indicated there is an adequate quantity of hunting areas (big/small game, waterfowl), campgrounds, backcountry camping sites, picnic areas, and rodeo grounds. For sports facilities, there are an adequate number of tennis courts, shooting ranges, horseshoe pits, golf courses, sports fields, and basketball courts. Finally, managers feel there are an adequate number of heritage areas and historic sites, education centers, and wild areas.

The top facility that managers indicated should be increased is walking/jogging/biking paths (51.4%). Of the top six facilities that had over 30% response rate for a need to increase, four facilities addressed trail needs, both on-road facilities and off-road trails for hiking, bicycling, and mountain biking. This suggests that there is an increasing demand among users for these facilities and an acknowledgment from managers that there are currently not enough paths and trails to meet this demand.

Bicycle lanes (37%) are the top desired facility for managers, meaning that many managers did not currently have bicycle lanes but would like to in order to meet the needs of users. Other bicycle needs indicated by facility managers include mountain bike trails (30.5%), as well as a desire to have BMX/mountain bike skills parks (26.5%). In addition to trails, water activities and resources were also a high need for facilities to increase as well as desired facilities, including water access (44.8%) and boat launches (37.5%), as well as more local facilities like splash/spray decks (26.3%) and waterparks (26.0%).

For facilities that managers felt are of adequate need, the highest responses include picnic facilities (59.4%), small/big game hunting areas (54.5%), horseshoe pits (51.5%), heritage/historic areas (51.5%), and football (50.5%) and baseball fields (50.0%).

### TOP FACILITIES TO INCREASE

- WALKING, JOGGING, BIKING PATHS
- LAKE AND RIVER ACCESS
- BOAT LAUNCHES
- HIKING TRAILS
- BIKE LANES ON ROADS
- MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

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### TOP DESIRED FACILITIES

- BIKE LANES ON ROAD
- BMX/MOUNTAIN BIKE SKILLS PARKS
- SPLASH/SPRAY DECKS
- WATERPARKS
- DISC GOLF/FOLF COURSES

### TOP ADEQUATE FACILITIES

- PICNIC FACILITIES
- SMALL/BIG GAME HUNTING AREAS
- HORSESHOE PITS
- HERITAGE/HISTORIC AREAS
- FOOTBALL FIELDS
- BASEBALL FIELDS

### TOP 5 FACILITIES IN GOOD/VERY GOOD CONDITION

- GOLF COURSES
- SNOWMOBILE TRAILS
- CAMPGROUND WITHOUT HOOKUPS
- CAMPGROUNDS WITH HOOKUPS
- SCENIC BYWAYS

### TOP 5 FACILITIES IN FAIR/POOR CONDITION

- BICYCLE LANES ON ROAD
- VOLLEYBALL COURTS
- HORSESHOE PITS
- MOTORIZED OFF-ROAD TRAILS
- WATERPARKS

For quality of facilities and resource areas, only those managers that managed the facility or area responded to the question; thus, the number of responses for quality is smaller than the overall responses for the assessment. Of the managers who had walking/jogging/bicycle paths and hiking trails, over 80% indicated that these facilities are in fair to very good condition. For facilities that had a higher rating of poor to fair than good to very good, bicycle lanes on roads is the highest rated poor to fair facility at 64%; about 72% of lacrosse fields are rated poor to fair, however the number of managers responding to this particular facility is quite low. Other facilities that are rated as majority poor to fair condition include volleyball courts (58%), horseshoe pits (53%), and motorized off-road trails (52%).

For other trail facilities, 48% of managers rated walking/jogging/bicycling paths as fair to poor, 43% for mountain biking trails, and 37% for hiking paths. This calls to attention the need for not just more paths and trails, but also for better quality paths and trails.

For sports facilities, 90% of managers rated golf courses as good to very good, followed by football fields (76%), baseball fields (70%), and softball fields (59%). Managers also rated BMX/mountain bike skills parks as good to very good (72%), but the number of responses for this facility was low. Sports facilities that managers rated in poor to fair condition include basketball courts (49%), tennis courts (44%), and soccer fields (41%). Most managers rated water-based and land-based areas as good to very good condition. Similarly, winter sports areas are generally good to very good, although 51% of managers rated sledding/tubing areas as poor to fair condition. For heritage/historic areas and sites, 34% of managers rated these areas in poor to fair condition. About 47% of managers rated dog parks as poor to fair, however the total number of managers who had dog parks was low.

### TOP 5 RESOURCE AREAS IN GOOD/VERY GOOD CONDITION

- SMALL GAME HUNTING AREAS
- DOWNHILL SKI AREAS
- BIG GAME HUNTING AREAS
- WATERFOWL HUNTING AREAS
- MOTORIZED BOATING AREAS

### TOP 5 RESOURCE AREAS IN FAIR/POOR CONDITION

- SLEDDING/TUBING AREAS
- HERITAGE/HISTORIC AREAS & SITES
- PLAYGROUNDS
- LAKE AND RIVER ACCESS
- WILDLIFE VIEWING AREAS

## EMERGING NEEDS AND ISSUES

Outdoor recreation managers were also asked about their top facility needs for the next five years. Managers listed a variety of needs, and ITRR categorized the responses for ease of comprehension and comparison; a full list of needs can be found in the report appendix.

The top facility need indicated by managers is aquatic facilities. For youth needs, playgrounds are the top need, and for adult/senior/ADA standards, hiking/bicycling trails is the top need. Hiking/bicycling trails is rated the second need for youth, while aquatic facilities is rated as the third need for youth. For adult/senior/ADA standards, campgrounds are listed as the second need. Other needs among managers, regardless of age, include expansion of current facilities, deferred maintenance needs, and improved water access.

Responses were also categorized by agency type and divided into two groups for comparison: local agencies (city, county, school, Tribal) and state/federal agencies. Local agencies indicate that aquatics facilities, playgrounds and hiking/biking trails are the top needs. The state and federal agencies identify campgrounds, water access and deferred maintenance as a primary needs. This demonstrates the differing needs between local agencies and state/federal agencies, although hiking/biking trails are one of the top needs in both groups. It should be noted that while it is not entirely clear what the difference is between hiking/biking trails and bicycling/walking paths from the responses, it is generally assumed that trails are off-road and unpaved, while paths can be on- or off-road but most likely paved.

### TOP FACILITIES NEEDS

- AQUATIC FACILITIES
- PLAYGROUND
- EXPAND FACILITIES
- DEFERRED MAINTENANCE
- WATER ACCESS

### TOP FACILITIES FOR YOUTH

- PLAYGROUNDS
- HIKING/BICYCLING TRAILS
- AQUATIC FACILITIES

### TOP FACILITIES FOR ADULT/SENIOR/ADA

- HIKING/BICYCLING TRAILS
- CAMPGROUND

### TOP FACILITY NEEDS FOR LOCAL AGENCIES (CITY, COUNTY, SCHOOL, TRIBAL)

- AQUATICS FACILITY
- PLAYGROUNDS
- HIKING/BIKING TRAILS
- BICYCLING/WALKING PATHS

### TOP FACILITY NEEDS FOR STATE, FEDERAL AGENCIES

- CAMPGROUND
- WATER ACCESS
- DEFERRED MAINTENANCE
- EXPAND FACILITIES
- HIKING/BIKING TRAILS



## TOP INFLUENTIAL THEMES/ISSUES

- YOUTH AND FUTURE GENERATIONS
- CHILDREN AND NATURE
- HEALTH BENEFITS OF RECREATION
- CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE
- AGING POPULATION
- INCREASED CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN TRAILS
- RECREATION DATA FOR JUSTIFICATION NEEDS

When looking at the responses by age, results indicate that local agencies see playgrounds and hiking/biking trails as a top need for youth, while state and federal agencies indicate campgrounds and water access as a top need. The top adult and senior needs for local agencies are hiking/biking trails and biking/walking paths, while state/federal agencies list campgrounds as the top need. ADA facility needs for both groups include hiking/biking trails. Again, a common theme between both groups is the need for hiking and biking trails for all.

Managers were asked how influential certain issues are when making decisions regarding facility improvements. The issue with the highest mean score is youth and future generations ( $m=3.38$ ). This is followed by health benefits of recreation ( $m=3.00$ ) and children and nature ( $m=3.00$ ). Issues with the lowest mean scores are nonresident users ( $m=2.15$ ), multi-use regional parks ( $m=2.27$ ) and providing opportunities for military veterans ( $m=2.30$ ).

## FUNDING

Funding for recreation continues to be a salient topic for many managers. Respondents were asked to compare their current level of funding from public tax allocations to five years ago. Fifty-three percent indicated their public tax funding stayed the same, 37% reported it had decreased and 10% indicated it had increased.

Managers were also asked to indicate their agencies sources of funding in the past five years. Approximately 48% of respondents use the federal government for a source of funding often or all the time, while 30% use the state. About 31% of respondents use park/user fees for funding often or all the time, and around 18% of respondents use friends groups or service groups for funding often or all the time, while another quarter indicated they use these groups sometimes.

When asked about likely collaborators over the next five years, non-profit and service-based organizations are listed as the top two collaborators at nearly 80% of responses, while only two-thirds of managers indicate they would collaborate with federal/state agencies. While there is a heavy reliance on government for funding sources, this indicates that there is a growing awareness among managers to use service-based organizations as partners on recreation projects. This does not necessarily correlate with funding sources, but it does suggest a change in how managers view government as a collaborator in the larger context of partnerships, wherein other organizations are taking a larger role in recreation projects.

# OUTDOOR RECREATION PREFERENCES

Outdoor recreation preferences among users are ever changing. In order to better understand the preferences, Montana State Parks worked with ITRR to also develop and implement a public recreational use survey. The purpose of the survey was to understand the current outdoor recreation facility uses by Montana residents, and specifically to: estimate resident's outdoor recreational activities; estimate outdoor recreation facility/area usage; assess overall quality of outdoor recreation experiences; and identify resident's perceptions of recreation resources in the state.

## PUBLIC RECREATIONAL USE SURVEY

The Public Recreational Use Survey was conducted through three methods: an intercept survey, an online survey, and a panel survey.<sup>5</sup> There were a total of 4,158 respondents for the intercept survey, and 580 respondents for the online and panel surveys. The online survey data was weighted to represent the population of Montana, based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates of county population.

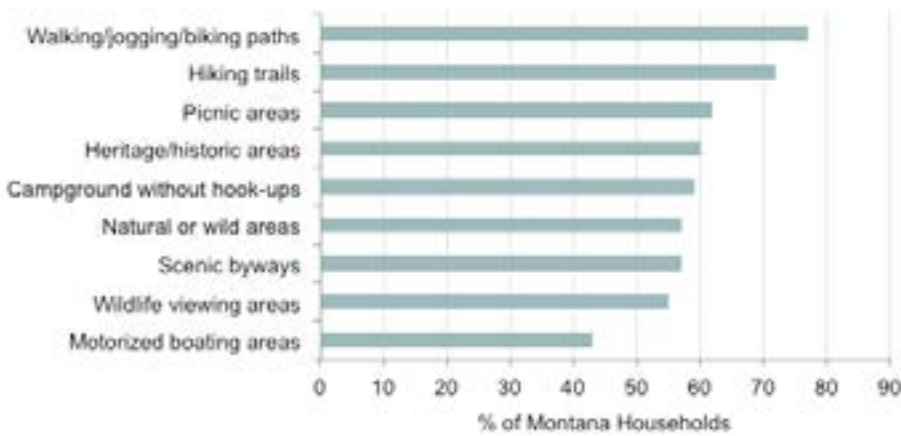
About 95% of Montanans feel that outdoor recreation is important or very important to their quality of life as well as their family's quality of life. Nearly 60% indicated it is very important to maintain existing facilities. Fifty-five percent of Montanans feel it is very important to make sure that budget cuts do not affect park and recreation agencies, while another 31% indicated it was important. Montana residents are also very happy with their outdoor recreation experiences in the state, with 81% indicating the overall quality of recreation experiences is excellent. Seventy percent of Montanans feel that natural areas in particular are in excellent quality, while 68% feel that sports facilities are in fair or poor condition. Generally, recreation experiences are positive for trails, cultural and historic areas, water-based activities, and snow-based activities.

Approximately 88% of Montana residents participated in any form of outdoor recreation in the past 12 months, with 74% of residents visiting public lands and 52% of Montana residents visiting a Montana State Park specifically. National forests are used by most residents, followed by rivers and streams, natural lakes, national parks, and state and city parks. Tribal lands, national wildlife refuges, national monuments, and county parks are used less frequently.

<sup>5</sup> Nickerson, N.P. & Metcalf, E.C. 2013. Montana SCORP: Public Recreational Use Study 2012. (Research Report 2013-4). Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, College of Forestry and Conservation, The University of Montana. <http://www.itrr.umt.edu/Research2013/SCORPResidentReport.pdf>.

About 77% of Montana households use walking/jogging/bicycling paths, the most of any facility/recreation area. Rounding out the top five are hiking trails (72%), picnic areas (62%), heritage/historic areas (60%), and campgrounds without hook-ups (59%). Other facilities and recreation areas that received use by more than 50% of households include motorized boating areas, natural or wild areas, scenic byways, and wildlife viewing areas. About 29% of households used bike lanes, 28% used off-road ATV trails, and 22% used mountain biking trails. For winter activities, a quarter of Montana households used sledding/tubing areas and 21% used cross-country skiing and snowshoe trails. Specialty facilities like horseshoe pits, tennis courts, splash decks, archery ranges, volleyball courts, and BMX parks were used by 10% or less of Montana households.

FIG 6. TOP 10 FACILITIES AND RECREATION AREAS USED BY MONTANA HOUSEHOLDS



The survey also asked respondents to assess each of those facilities in terms of the need for more, less, or if there is an adequate amount. The top statewide need reported by all residents to the survey is bike lanes, followed by rifle/handgun ranges, off-road ATV trails, and sledding/tubing areas. Bike lanes in particular had the highest response where more respondents indicated a need to increase over adequate need. In many cases, the respondent had no opinion of the assessment of the facility.

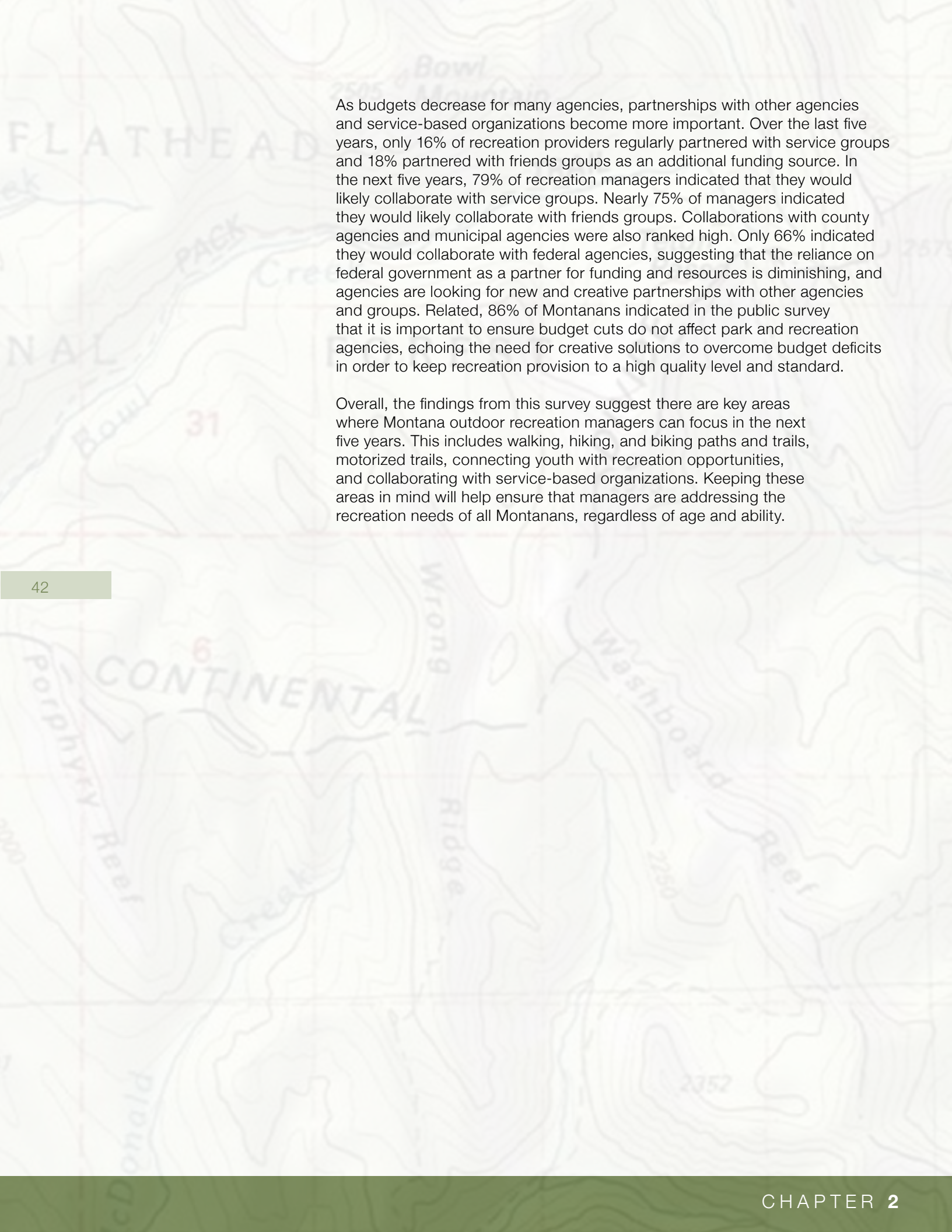
The results of the survey are also analyzed on a regional level, and presented in Chapter 5 SCORP Regional Profiles. Some regions had small response sizes, and thus caution is used in making regional assumptions. Nevertheless, a regional breakdown is still useful to inform facility use and assessment for statewide decision making. The results of the survey are discussed in more detail below.

## CONCLUSION

A number of themes emerged from the two surveys implemented in the SCORP planning process. Trails and paths are identified by recreation providers as a one of the top facilities to increase throughout the state. Walking, jogging, and biking paths in particular are the most desired facility among managers, as well as the most used facility among recreation users. Hiking trails, bike lanes on roads, and mountain biking trails are also priority considerations among managers. This reflects the growing demand for walking and biking amenities in communities and connecting to public lands. Also, trails and paths can accommodate many different types of users, especially when designed and constructed using universal design principles—they can be used by parents with strollers, people who use wheelchairs, youth, adults, and seniors. ADA standards for trails and paths need improvement throughout the state, and accessibility is one major priority area for many recreation providers.

In addition to trails, recreation providers ranked aquatic facilities as a top need in the next five years, particularly for youth and among city, county, school, and Tribal agencies. Aquatic facilities, like outdoor swimming pools and splash pools, are community assets that bring people together in a social and community environment. About 34% of resident households use outdoor pools, while another 25% use water parks. Only 9% of residents use splash decks, but that could be due to the fact that they are not as prevalent as pools. Water parks in particular received a higher response for need to increase than adequate among recreation users. Many communities in Montana are rural and spread out, and aquatic facilities have become nodes of interaction during the summer when people are outdoors and active. The need for outdoor pools was a strong theme in Montana's 2008-2012 SCORP, and it is again a priority for the next five years.

One difference between the manager survey and the public survey is motorized recreation. Recreation facility managers felt that motorized off-road trails were of adequate quantity, while off-road ATV trails was identified among recreation users as one of the top needs in the state. Again, the results from the manager survey could be skewed towards what is available on school properties, as schools had the highest response rate. Approximately 53% of respondents to the public use survey indicated that off-road ATV trails should be increased, while only 21% indicated there was an adequate quantity. This reflects the growing desire for motorized recreation in Montana that is reflected in other sources, like OHV registration. A full discussion of motorized recreation is found in Chapter 4 Trends and Use Patterns.



As budgets decrease for many agencies, partnerships with other agencies and service-based organizations become more important. Over the last five years, only 16% of recreation providers regularly partnered with service groups and 18% partnered with friends groups as an additional funding source. In the next five years, 79% of recreation managers indicated that they would likely collaborate with service groups. Nearly 75% of managers indicated they would likely collaborate with friends groups. Collaborations with county agencies and municipal agencies were also ranked high. Only 66% indicated they would collaborate with federal agencies, suggesting that the reliance on federal government as a partner for funding and resources is diminishing, and agencies are looking for new and creative partnerships with other agencies and groups. Related, 86% of Montanans indicated in the public survey that it is important to ensure budget cuts do not affect park and recreation agencies, echoing the need for creative solutions to overcome budget deficits in order to keep recreation provision to a high quality level and standard.

Overall, the findings from this survey suggest there are key areas where Montana outdoor recreation managers can focus in the next five years. This includes walking, hiking, and biking paths and trails, motorized trails, connecting youth with recreation opportunities, and collaborating with service-based organizations. Keeping these areas in mind will help ensure that managers are addressing the recreation needs of all Montanans, regardless of age and ability.