

1.1. Establish icons of "spectacular unspoiled nature" throughout Montana

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

TAC, MTOT, Regions, CVBs

- » Jointly identify specific locations throughout the state that epitomize the diverse array of "spectacular unspoiled nature" found in Montana. Icons can be selected not only for each tourism region, but also for specific niche markets.

MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

Produce or select images of each icon for use in promotional campaigns and collateral and other promotion efforts.

- » "Iconify" these selected locations – using their images in tourism marketing materials consistently and in a manner that evokes an emotional response, so that they become recognizable by non-resident markets and come to represent the spectacular unspoiled nature of the region in the mind of non-resident visitors.
- » Work with public land management agencies to enlist their support in establishing the iconic nature of locations under their management.

Indicators of Success

- » Each tourism region has identified a location(s) that epitomizes the "spectacular unspoiled nature" that the region has to offer. Locations that are iconic for specific activities have been identified.
- » Images of these locations are used across marketing materials, such that they have become representative of their regions and have become recognizable to targeted non-resident markets.
- » These locations become "tourism icons" for their regions – recognizable and associated with Montana by potential visitors.

Background & Rationale

"Tourism icons" are landmarks that are instantly recognizable and represent to visitors important tourist attractions or experiences. Such icons can be crucial in the marketing of destinations. An iconic image can exert a very strong marketing influence, offering an experience that *pulls* the traveler to visit the destination, and is particularly useful when the destination is relatively unknown in the marketplace. New icons can be created through a process of (1) identification, (2) marketing emphasis, and (3) interpretation to evoke certain emotions.

Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park are Montana's most recognizable icons. Montana's branding research concluded that the state has a number of specific locations or natural features that *could be* iconic of its spectacular unspoiled nature, but these locations are not well known outside the state or are not associated with Montana in the minds of non-residents. The branding consultant recommended development of 8-10 such icons. ITRR's Nickerson and Moisey similarly recommended the use of natural features and niche market features as icons (e.g., Virginia City and Nevada City to target visitors primarily drawn by history).

Identifying several iconic locations drawn from all six tourism regions that capture Montana's "spectacular unspoiled nature" will help the regions to market with brand consistency. Greater brand consistency strengthens the marketing power of the brand, which should improve the conversion rates of marketing efforts and bring more travelers to Montana.

Diversifying the iconic images *within* the Montana Brand will facilitate promotion of the less-visited regions, helping to balance distribution of tourism throughout the state. Through targeted marketing, these locations can become iconic for specific market segments and may help tap segments that have to date been underdeveloped. As a result, tourism could be increased in less-visited areas and seasons.

Resources

Nickerson & Moisey, 1999, *Branding a state from features to positioning: Making it simple?*, at <http://www.itrr.umt.edu/articles.htm>

1.1. Integrate public lands more fully and functionally into tourism information

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product and marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT, Regions

- » Show the location of the public lands on official tourism websites. Highlight iconic locations within those lands (see Strategic Action 1.1.).
- » Make the following information more prominent on official tourism websites: access points to public lands; recreational, natural, historic, cultural, and heritage assets located on public lands; and recreational activities available and allowed on public lands.
- » Link to useful maps produced by public land management agencies and other entities.
- » Link to other *specific* pages of particular value to visitors from the public land agency websites (rather than the agency's home page) or request permission to pull content from them.
- » Share information with each public land management agency that is useful in meeting their own mandates for the promotion of recreation on public lands; for example:
 - use of agency information in tourism promotion and visitor information;
 - research or data regarding public land use by non-resident visitors; and
 - information regarding the Montana Brand pillars and tourism promotion activities.
- » Share with public land management agencies information and insights regarding infrastructure or other visitor needs on the lands they manage.

CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Make the following information more prominent on official tourism websites: access points to public lands; recreational activities available and allowed on public lands; and recreational, natural, historic, cultural, and heritage assets located on public lands.
- » Work with local governments to develop information regarding city and county parks that could be important recreation assets for non-resident tourism. Provide information to MTOT and Regions for incorporation into tourism websites.
- » Identify high quality local assets for outdoor recreation, such as local bike trails, favorite public sledding hills, and parks with playground equipment or other features attractive to traveling families.

Indicators of Success

- » Information regarding public lands in each of the six tourism regions is readily available in a usable form on or through MTOT and regional websites.
- » Information is sufficiently comprehensive for non-residents to plan activities on public lands for recreational, natural, cultural, historic, and heritage tourism.

- » Visitors can easily identify opportunities to enjoy Montana’s natural wonders, allowing Montana to deliver on its brand promise of “more spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48.”
- » Awareness of the large number of access points and activities available encourages more trips, extended trips, and more trips to less-visited areas. Thus, economic benefits are increased throughout the state.

Background & Rationale

Following is a list of agencies that manage public lands for recreational use in Montana:

- » U.S. Forest Service
- » U.S. National Park Service
- » Bureau of Land Management
- » U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- » Bureau of Reclamation
- » U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- » Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

Montana’s vast public lands are central to delivering on its brand promise of “more spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48.” Providing more substantive information regarding these public lands and how they may be accessed is essential to facilitating trip planning and will help create deliverable expectations for the non-resident visitor. Awareness of the large number of access points and activities available can encourage (i) extending the length of the trip and (ii) extending visitation to areas that would otherwise be overlooked. The result is a potential to increase economic benefits throughout the state. The information available from public land management agencies is valuable but can be difficult or time-consuming for visitors to find. To tap this resource, the tourism sector must gather the most useful and appealing information for the potential visitor and make it readily available as part of Montana’s visitor information resources (directly or through links).

Maps will be among the most important of these informational resources, particularly because non-resident visitors may be unfamiliar with many place names or have a limited sense of the distances involved. Maps allow visitors to build a realistic itinerary.

Montana’s tourism promotion bodies and public land management agencies share a number of goals, making theirs a natural partnership. Raising awareness and appreciation of Montana’s public lands and their full recreation potential supports the *mutual* goals of promoting recreation, supporting preservation, and ensuring appropriate recreational use by visitors. To help strengthen the partnership, tourism stakeholders should let public land management agencies know when they are linking to their information in tourism sites and acknowledge the value their work. Unilaterally sharing research, data, or other information regarding visitors’ use of the public lands can also build stronger inter-agency partnership.

1.3. Present natural assets in an experiential manner

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana’s tourism product and marketing efforts.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT, Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Use images and text in visitor information and marketing pieces that reflect not only the scenic beauty of the state or region, but the *experiences* and activities that visitors will enjoy in that setting.
- » Monitor and consider trends in outdoor recreation when developing promotional materials.
- » Present cultural or heritage *experiences* rather than just assets or locations; for example: taking horseback or wagon rides, or attending county fairs or rodeos, to experience the agricultural and pioneering heritage as opposed to simply seeing agricultural areas through a windshield.
- » Target market segments with specific experiences that are particularly appealing to them.
- » Link to electronic word-of-mouth – including travel blogs and reviews – to showcase experiences available in a particular natural setting.
- » Present iconic locations (see Action 1.1.) in an experiential manner.

Indicators of Success

- » Existing and developing visitor information presents Montana’s spectacular nature in an experiential way. Montana is differentiated from other destinations that offer “unspoiled nature” by the “breathtaking experiences” that can be enjoyed within the natural setting, as promised by the Montana Brand.

Background & Rationale

Research consistently shows that today’s traveler seeks *experiences*, rather than just attractions. It is important, then, for a visitor to know not only that Montana offers spectacular natural assets, but also what they can *do* within that setting. This allows them to start envisioning their vacation experience (making a “vacation movie”) – a crucial step between having Montana on their list of places they’d like to go and actually planning and booking a trip.

Presenting Montana’s spectacular natural setting in an experiential way also differentiates Montana from other places that offer similar scenery. A 2006 analysis of all 50 state tourism websites found that *most* of the sites emphasize nature and culture/heritage as their unique selling proposition. Montana’s neighboring states offer many of the same scenic assets as Montana. It is important, therefore, for the potential visitor to see the superb *experience* offered in Montana’s natural setting versus other similar settings.

Iconic locations (see Action 1.1.) should be selected and presented with an experiential perspective. For example, if the Yellowstone River were to be used, it can be shown with paddlers or fishermen.

A 2010 U.S. Forest Service assessment (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2012) found that outdoor recreational participation is growing, and that activity choices are changing. Viewing natural scenery, flora, and wildlife continue to be the most common activities, with more than half the population participating in each and participation growing by 18% to 25% from the early-2000s through recent years. Participation in birding, as another example, grew by almost 23% over that period to top one-third of the

population. While participation in non-motorized water-sports is still less common (less than 10% of the population), it is growing rapidly, including a 103% increase in kayaking. These trends can help to guide targeted marketing and the experiential presentation of Montana's natural assets in promotional efforts. Allowing visitors to leave "trip reports", travel blogs, or reviews of their experiences in Montana on visitor information sites adds the credibility of word-of-mouth recommendations. Links to reviews or travel blogs on other travel sites also serve this purpose. Particularly enthusiastic reviews can be highlighted in visitor information to help inspire potential travelers.

Resources

See research available from the Outdoor Foundation at <http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/>
Excellent information regarding the "buy cycle" of travelers: *European Segmentation Study: Alberta Summary*, by Insignia Market Research, 2008, especially pp.15-16, at [http://industry.travelalberta.com/Markets/~media/Industry/Attachments/Markets/Research/AlbertaSummary2008.ashx](http://industry.travelalberta.com/Markets/~/media/Industry/Attachments/Markets/Research/AlbertaSummary2008.ashx)

1.4. Participate in planning processes for public lands management

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product and builds respect for the tourism industry in Montana.

Recommended Tactics

MTOT

- » Clearly and consistently state the importance of public land management for tourism in Montana. Clearly state MTOT's commitment to leading active involvement by the tourism community.
- » Identify a point of contact with whom the tourism community can actively engage for each of the public land management agencies. Reach out to this point of contact to initiate an *active* partnership between tourism and the agency.
- » When authorized by the administration, work with public land management agencies to identify and address issues of access and visitor service needs on public lands (see Strategic Action 4.7.).
- » When authorized by the administration, represent the tourism sector in planning processes, through document reviews, and by communicating directly with land management agencies regarding tourism interests, research, and initiatives.
- » Encourage tourism stakeholders to participate in the public land management process. Coordinate the sharing of background information to support accurate, consistent, and effective representation of tourism interests (see Strategic Action 5.1.).

Regions, CVBs, Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Become an active and informed participant in public planning processes for public lands in the area. Monitor the management agency(ies) website(s) for important planning documents or planning activities; let others in the area know about important issues or developments; and participate in public comment opportunities.
- » Find other involved tourism stakeholders – in your community, your region, or the state – and coordinate your efforts. Share background information, insights, and tourism talking points to represent tourism's interests more effectively, more consistently, and with less effort.

Indicators of Success

- » The Montana tourism community is recognized by public land managers and by the public as an active partner in public land management processes.
- » MTOT's coordination allows MTOT and other stakeholders to efficiently convey a tourism perspective whenever needed.
- » Tourism interests are considered in all key decisions regarding management, access, and alternate uses of public lands, so that Montana can deliver on its brand promise of "spectacular unspoiled nature" now and into the future.
- » MTOT and key stakeholders provide the tourism perspective for use in planning documents, where appropriate.

- » The tourism community is aware of public lands planning processes, and is well informed regarding planning issues relevant to tourism.
- » Tourism stakeholders participate in public forums for public land management planning, or provide input through other means.

Background & Rationale

Public lands are an important asset for Montana’s tourism sector. Management agencies preserve, maintain, and promote these lands in large part for recreation, contributing significantly to Montana’s “spectacular unspoiled nature”. Management of these lands and access to them holds important implications for the long term success of Montana’s tourism industry. As new management plans are developed for each public land area over the coming years, it will be important for MTOT and the tourism community to provide input so that tourism interests are considered in decisions regarding management and alternate uses of these lands.

Participation of tourism interests in public lands management also offers benefits for the public land management agencies, by ensuring that preservation and recreation goals receive public support. Participating in the document review process for each management plan offers a way for MTOT to efficiently and effectively represent the tourism perspective, raise concerns, and contribute solutions. Establishing the key elements of MTOT’s (and the tourism industry’s) position – clearly, concisely, and as early as possible – can further minimize the time needed to provide input and can also improve the consistency of that input across planning processes.

Key planning processes for tourism community involvement include the following:

- » U.S. Forest Service Lands: National Forest Plan Revisions for each National Forest.
- » U.S. National Park Service: Revision of planning documents related to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks, national historic sites, and the national register of historic places.
- » U.S. Bureau of Land Management Lands: Resource Management Plan revisions for each BLM region.
- » U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Planning for Fort Peck Dam, Libby Dam, and Lake Koocanusa.
- » U.S. Bureau of Reclamation: Resource Management Plan revisions for nine reservoirs, Canyon Ferry Lake, and (through NPS management) Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area.
- » U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Planning for each of the 21 wildlife refuges and five wetlands managed in Montana.
- » Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks: Management Plan revisions for each Montana state park; 2014-2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). See <http://stateparks.mt.gov/about-us/parksData.html>.