

# MARKETING PLAN & BUDGET

## 2021 – 2022



Andy Austin



VISIT SOUTHEAST  
**MONTANA**

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Nathan Satran Photography



## WE'RE BIG OUT HERE

That is what a visit to Southeast Montana promises. Wide-open spaces. Historical stories. Deeply-rooted traditions. And, adventures as varied as stars in the vast night skies.

Out here, Big Sky meets big adventure. It's the kind of place to slow down and fall in love with Montana. It's the kind of place where cowboys still ride horses across the open plains. It's the kind of place where dinosaur fossils are waiting to be discovered and history is rooted in the land. It's the kind of place where visitors can steep in the myriad colors of a prairie sunset and feel the drum beat that nourished the indigenous tribes for generations.

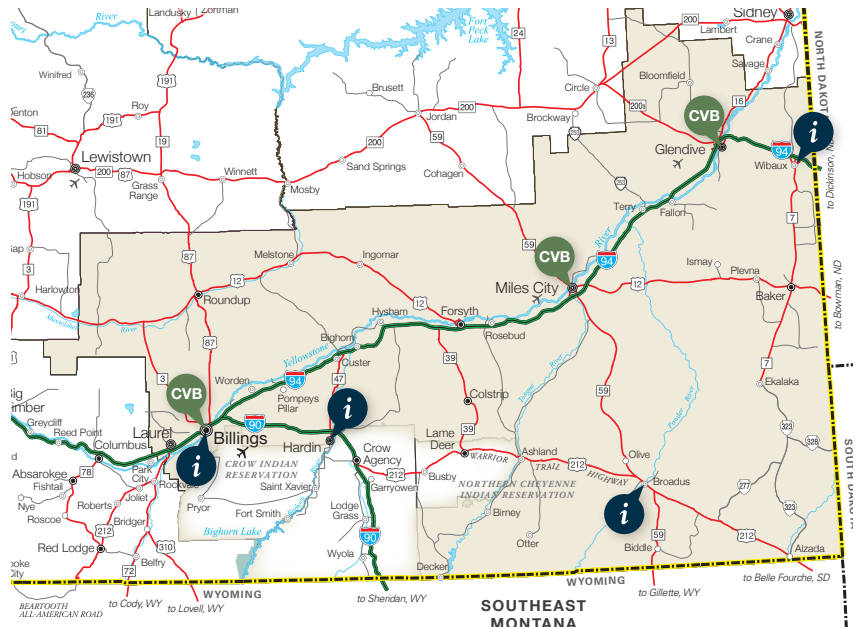
## THIS IS SOUTHEAST MONTANA.



## WHO WE ARE

### A BRIEF HISTORY

Originally called “Custer Country,” Visit Southeast Montana began in 1984 as an organization charged with helping bring tourists to the region. It was named for one of its most famous attractions, the Little Bighorn Battlefield. In 1987 the Montana Legislature enacted a 4 percent Lodging Facility Use Tax to fund tourism promotion organizations. At that time, Custer Country became one of six state-funded tourism regions in the state. This organization continued to market the 13 counties and two Indian Reservations of Southeast Montana until 2010. The Billings Chamber of Commerce received the contract from the Montana Department of Commerce to manage the region and the organization moved from Forsyth to Billings. In 2012, the Custer Country Board of Directors voted to change the name of the region to “Visit Southeast Montana.”



From a traveler’s perspective, it may seem like there is not much “out here” but the FY22 campaign will demonstrate otherwise.

### THE ORGANIZATION

Visit Southeast Montana is a private, nonprofit organization managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. We serve as a voice for Southeast Montana’s tourism and hospitality industries, seeking to promote the region’s many attractions, events and communities while ensuring that tourism is recognized as one of the region’s top economic drivers, especially when changes to local and state-wide legislation are considered. Visit Southeast Montana consists of two full-time staff members under contract with the Montana Department of Commerce and is directed by a board consisting of no more than 21 members from across the region.

Visit Southeast Montana partners with the region’s two Convention & Visitors Bureaus (Billings and Miles City; Glendive hopes to regain CVB status again in FY23) along with hoteliers, chambers of commerce and other tourism-related entities including state parks, county and federal organizations, plus private businesses ranging from coffee shops and restaurants to guide services, art galleries and private tour operators. The stakeholders and tourism partners of Southeast Montana provide the essence, flavor, identity and unique character of the region.

### MISSION

The mission of Visit Southeast Montana is to increase tourism to Southeast Montana by increasing the awareness of our region, showcasing our cultural heritage, developing memorable experiences and educating our residents about the economic benefits of tourism.

### VISIT SOUTHEAST MONTANA VISION STATEMENT:

Southeast Montana will become the trusted source for free-spirited travelers to achieve their legendary life experiences.



# IDENTITY

## KEY CHARACTERISTICS

This vast region, blessed with a diversity of people, geography and cultures, prides itself on connecting with visitors who enjoy our six very distinctive characteristics:

### 1. OUTDOOR RECREATION

There is no doubt that opportunities for outdoor recreation abound across Southeast Montana – many exist on public lands and waterways. Fishermen will appreciate the world-class fishing opportunities available along the Bighorn and Musselshell Rivers, Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area (BCNRA) and the Paddlefish Harvest along the banks of the Yellowstone River near Glendive, along with an emerging catfish and bass fishery on the Yellowstone River. Hunters continue to pay premium prices to travel to the Powder River area to bag trophy deer and antelope. The Bull Mountains near Roundup are a rising star for elk hunters, and Eastern Montana is becoming known throughout the surrounding states for being great bird hunting country, allowing hunters to stretch their hunting season with pheasant, grouse, chukers, ducks and geese.

Hiking and camping enthusiasts will relish the freedom and solitude of the Custer National Forest, Chalk Buttes, Terry Badlands and Medicine Rocks State Park, along with the fore-mentioned Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. Makoshika State Park, Montana's largest state park, features some of the nation's most spectacular badlands scenery while the Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area remains pristine. The Yellowstone River Coalition (at the time of publication) is seeking funding to create a recreation corridor along the lower Yellowstone River, from Billings to the confluence with the Missouri River. This project would pursue public-private partnerships and allow for more access to boating and camping along the Lower Yellowstone.



The wide-open prairies of the Southeast Montana region also boasts some of the darkest night skies – ideal for stargazing and planet observing – in the high plains of the inner Rocky Mountain region of the U.S. In late December 2020, Medicine Rocks State Park was designated an International Dark Sky Sanctuary – that means the park is the darkest of the dark. This international designation is only one of two in the state of Montana and elevates the Southeast Montana region in the eyes of star-gazers.

### 2. WESTERN AUTHENTICITY

Many states and regions like to think they possess true western culture, but in SEMT's rural communities, as well as cities such as Billings and Miles City, visitors can get a true picture of everything that was right about the Old West. From Montana's largest state fair in Billings to feel-good, small-town rodeos, Southeast Montana communities have kept western hospitality alive. Standout western events include the Bucking Horse Sale in Miles City, the NILE and Chase Hawkes Rodeos in Billings and Little Bighorn Days in Hardin –



from ranch rodeos to larger circuit Professional Bull Riders, the region hosts a rodeo almost every weekend of the warm season, plus plenty in other months. Authenticity is the key word when listing this strength. Simply traveling across the region solidifies that experience when a visitor may have to wait for cowboys to herd their cattle across the road or they experience the western lifestyle while visiting Southeast Montana's small communities and businesses.

### 3. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Southeast Montana contains a wealth of historical sites which are internationally known and are of great significance to the story of America. The Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, site of Custer's Last Stand and the nation's most famous Native American victory, is located in Big Horn County and is the third most-visited destination in Montana behind Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. Pompeys Pillar National Monument bears William Clark's signature and is the only remaining in-the-field, physical evidence of the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

Due the pandemic, the Trail to the Little Bighorn, which is funded by the Eastern Montana Tourism Initiative, was postponed and will re-start in FY22. The first phase of this project, which utilizes the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument as its centerpiece, connects the dots between the renowned battlefield with related locations and sites across the entire region.

Many other state parks, museums and historic sites tell their own stories of pioneer life on the prairie, the Native American struggle to leave behind their nomadic way of life and the impact of the cattle trade on the American West. From large and well-known to more intimate, all are part of the story of the American West and can be experienced in Southeast Montana.

### 4. ACCESSIBILITY AND FACILITIES

Southeast Montana is fortunate to contain two of the state's busiest highways, Interstate 94 and Interstate 90 that funnel drive-traffic directly into Southeast Montana, converging in Billings. Montana Highway 212, also called the Warrior Trail, cuts from Belle Fourche, SD, to Crow Agency, and offers a two-lane alternative into the region.

Located within a day's drive from the major metropolitan areas of Denver, Seattle and Minneapolis-St. Paul, plus all of Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota, the Southeast Montana region is truly accessible for a vast drive-market. In FY22 Billings Logan Airport, which boasts United, Delta, American, Alaska/Horizon, Frontier and Allegiant Airlines direct service to eight destinations, including seasonal direct service to/from Chicago, San Diego and Los Angeles, will continue a \$55 million expansion and remodel. Despite pandemic-related slow-downs, American Airlines added a second daily flight to/from DFW and the airport expansion will increase gate capacity from five to eight.

Regional shoppers are also drawn to Billings, the state's largest city, for boutiques, burgeoning downtown district and major shopping centers. Lodging opportunities in Southeast Montana are incredibly diverse, including everything from 4-star hotels, to charming bed and breakfasts, RV parks, rustic camping, hunting and fishing lodges.

### 5. DINOSAUR ADVENTURE

The plains, prairies and buttes of Southeast Montana are dinosaur country. Famous dinosaurs taken from the Southeast Montana area of the Hell Creek Formation include Tyrannosaurus Rex, Maiasaura and Triceratops. Walk with the dinosaurs in Makoshika State Park and visit three museums and facilities that are active members of the well-established Montana Dinosaur Trail. The museums showcase the many paleontological treasures which have been discovered in Eastern Montana. Museums of particular interest to dinosaur enthusiasts include the Carter County Museum, Glendive Dinosaur & Fossil Museum, Frontier Gateway Museum and the Makoshika State Park Interpretive Center. Individuals and families can also opt for a private fossil dig or work with a paleo adventure in Makoshika State Park. This broad category includes fossil and rock collectors.



## 6. NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE

When visitors from the eastern U.S., Europe, and Asia visit the West, they are innately curious about Native American culture. They grew up reading stories and watching the movies about the tribes that once dominated the American West. Southeast Montana is fortunate enough to play host to Crow Fair, one of the last great Native American cultural events, held annually on the Crow Reservation plus the Cheyenne Victory Days celebration held on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. These events gives visitors the opportunity to witness how Native American culture has evolved and the importance the tribes continue to place on their history and traditions. The Northern Cheyenne Reservation contains an incredible variety of historical sites, as well as opportunities to purchase hand-made gifts and educational experiences presented by local tour guides. The history of the region is inseparable from the history of the tribes who live in it to this day.

## KEY CHALLENGES FACING THE REGION

### 1. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Likely this challenge does not need introduction. At this time (April 2021), the world has experienced shutdowns, quarantines and vaccines for more than a year. Post-pandemic “rules” continue to evolve while the tourism and travel industry works to re-invent itself and entire populations seek to determine what “safe” travel includes. Montana is currently “open” and while this status could change, it could also create challenges in terms of visitor numbers, expectations and behavior (as perceived by Montanans). In addition, tribal tourism partners are less likely to welcome visitation and may even be closed or enforce check-points to ensure the safety of their tribal members (at this time, April, 2021 both the Crow and Northern Cheyenne reservations are closed). As vaccines are being promoted, the environment will likely continue in a state of dynamic change. With no roadmap, it will take some time to determine what travel and tourism looks like in the post-pandemic world.

Visit Southeast Montana functions as both a Destination Marketing Organization and a Destination Management Organization during this transition.

### 2. PERCEPTION THAT MONTANA IS FAR AWAY AND DIFFICULT TO TRAVEL TO.

According to the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analysts, Montana is perceived as challenging to access with associated time and cost that prohibits visitation. Conversely, Colorado (the top regional competitor) was cited as the best destination in regard to scenic beauty, potential for vacation road trip, family-friendly environment, national parks, winter recreational activities and places “I most want to visit.” However, Montana as a whole and Southeast Montana specifically are well-positioned to capitalize on Colorado’s weaknesses: crowded attractions; lack of or losing authenticity; high costs and over-development. However, in the post-COVID crisis environment, this “far away” concept could prove to make Southeast Montana more desirable than other travel locations.

### 3. “REGIONS” ARE CONFUSING.

Tourists typically do not travel via regions, but rather travel to destinations. That is where the identity starts. A marketing campaign that weaves destinations with geographic location will enhance the brand. Additionally, regional partnerships will help strengthen the brand within both the state and four-state region. While the Montana brand should, and does, include Southeast Montana, it is easy for the individuality of the region to be lost within the greater whole. The challenge is to be distinctive while still intertwined within the Montana brand.

### 4. DISTANCES BETWEEN SERVICES.

Today’s traveler has higher expectations in terms of cellular service and connectivity to a global network. Connectivity and access to instant, digital information has been especially enhanced during the COVID crisis. While the distance between towns and services are a challenge to Southeast Montana, that very element may also enhance its appeal in the post-COVID environment, as long as travelers know what to expect. For example, continuing the “We’re Big Out Here” concept into a mini-marketing campaign that includes tear-off and downloadable maps and itineraries will entice travelers who desire “social distance” and open spaces.



## 5. UNDERDEVELOPED TOURISM PRODUCT.

Research from both Destination Analysts and the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research has identified outdoor recreation as a top activity for Southeast Montana's target audience. Despite the wealth of unspoiled nature available, little infrastructure exists for many areas. Strengthening partnerships within the region will help identify tourism products that need assistance for wayfinding, signage and potential promotion. Additionally, working with these partners to secure tourism grants from the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development may help overcome the funding obstacles. Tribal Tourism is also a key partner, as tribal tourism products lack in development and maturity but are in high demand. In addition, not all reservations are or will be open to visitation at this time (April, 2021), as their priority is to keep tribal members safe as the pandemic eases.

Lastly, we anecdotally hear that visitors want a "Western" experience, yet the region lacks tourism products like trail rides, guided tours/agri-tourism and the like. These types of products greatly enhance the visitors' understanding of the West. Visit Southeast Montana has and will continue to collaborate in all these efforts. However, please note that post-COVID, outdoor recreation will likely be an even more popular activity for locals and tourists alike, which may stress this under-developed product, especially public access points and lands.

## TARGET MARKETS

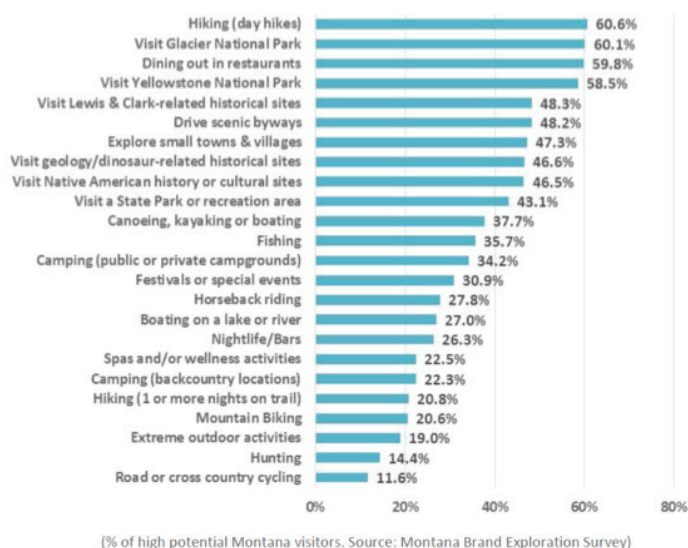
Prior to the COVID pandemic, Visit Southeast Montana paralleled the target market identified by the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, as identified here:

According to the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analysts, the High-Profile Visitor (HPV) is not only attracted to Montana, he/she sees the destination as more attractive and competitive when compared to its regional competition. The HPVs are:

- City dwellers (not rural and not suburban)
- Married with children
- Well-educated
- Affluent (>\$80K)
- Younger (average age 36.4)
- Frequent travelers
- Male-oriented (54.3% male vs 45.7% female)
- Strongly attracted to and familiar with Montana's tourism offerings
- Likely repeat visitors
- Outdoor-oriented travelers (psychographic index)

The HPV's desired activity on a Montana trip relates directly to their psychographic profile of being outdoor-oriented travelers with these favored activities, as indicated in this graph.

Desired Activities on a Montana Trip



### 10 OF THE TOP 12 DESIRED ACTIVITIES ALIGN WITH VISIT SEMT'S PILLARS.

Additionally, Destination Analysts identified two niche markets: family travelers and history buffs. Both niches align with Southeast Montana's strengths, with history buffs fitting a cross-section of SEMT's historical significance, western authenticity and Native American culture.

However, as we move forward into the "new normal" in the post-pandemic world, Visit Southeast Montana will retain the flexibility to pivot, mainly by using digital media, which has a short lead-time, and year-round paid social presence.

At this time, Visit Southeast Montana plans to focus on HPVs in drive geo-markets (see road-trippers below). In addition, we will incorporate findings from the FY21 marketing plan (which is in progress) as the marketing plan develops mid-way through FY22.



Donnie Sexton





Jeff Bartlett

## TOP GEO-MARKETS

Using data collected by Visit Southeast Montana, we can analyze existing marketing efforts and incorporate these geo-targets into the FY22 target markets.

### WEBSITE TOP 10 STATES

Montana  
Minnesota  
Washington  
California  
Colorado  
Illinois  
Utah  
North Dakota  
Texas  
South Dakota

### FACEBOOK

Illinois  
Montana  
South Dakota  
Minnesota  
North Dakota  
Colorado  
Washington  
Wyoming  
Texas  
Utah

### TOP STATES FOR NEWSLETTER OPENS

California  
New York  
Washington  
Florida  
Georgia  
Illinois  
Montana  
Colorado  
New Jersey  
Virginia

### TOP LOCATIONS BASED ON EMAIL/SIGN UP FORM

Billings, Montana  
Brooklyn, New York  
Chicago, Illinois

### TOP STATES FOR REQUESTED TRAVEL GUIDES

Montana  
California  
Texas  
Minnesota  
Illinois  
Washington  
Florida  
Wisconsin  
Pennsylvania  
Colorado

Instagram only gives the top 5 cities – all are in Montana. Based on this information, Visit Southeast Montana will target Western Montana, neighboring states of Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota and Midwestern states, particularly Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. In addition, Washington, Colorado, California and Texas all exhibit strong interest in the region.

Visit Southeast Montana will continue to build on these target markets as budget allows; however, we will pivot to focus on niche markets as identified here. Note, many of these targets “cross-over,” meaning that a drive-market location may also include History Buffs.



## NICHE MARKETS

Research conducted by the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research supported a premise that many in the tourism industry have repeatedly stated: We – residents of Montana – love this vast, complex state and travel extensively throughout it. In fact, according to the 2018 Resident Travel in Montana report, including both resident and nonresident travel spending, total travel industry spending in Montana is \$6.23 billion dollars; 54 percent contributed by nonresidents and 46 percent by resident travel within the state.

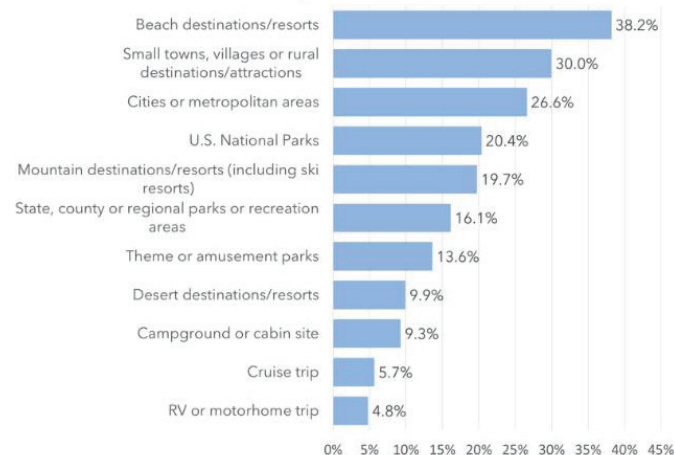
### ROAD-TRIPPERS

Also identified in the 2016 Montana Destination Brand Research Study by Destination Analytics, Inc., the road-tripper market includes travelers from Midwestern states who drive through the Southeast Montana region on the way to Yellowstone and Glacier national parks. We include RVers and campers in this niche market.

In the post-pandemic landscape of FY22, we will focus on the road tripper/geomarkets identified on page 8. Visitation data from Makoshika State Park notes that North Dakota and Minnesota are the top non-resident states-of-origin at Montana's largest state park.

According to Destination Analysts traveler sentiment surveys during the COVID Crisis, American travelers will seek beaches (38%), then small towns and rural communities and attractions (30%). Only 20% cited national parks as their first trip post-pandemic. At this time (April 2021), air travel is starting to rebound. Even as that increases, the road-tripper market will be incredibly important to the Southeast Montana region.

### Americans' First Trip Destination Post-Pandemic



### HISTORY BUFF

With the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument averaging approximately 250,000 visitors per year and Pompeys Pillar National Monument matching the "Visit Lewis & Clark historical sites" as the number 5 Desired Activity on a Montana Trip (according to Destination Analysts 2016 Montana Brand Study), plus the soon-to-be-developed Trail to the Little Bighorn, Visit Southeast Montana will continue to market to the history buff in FY22.

### INTERNATIONAL

The Montana Travel Trade office identifies the United Kingdom, Germany and Australia as top three target markets and Visit Southeast Montana will continue building these relationships, as this is low-cost investment for a higher-than-average return spend.

According to ITRR's 2018 Nonresident Visitation, Expenditures & Economic Impacts study, overseas visitors averaged \$1,186 per trip with an average stay of 5.5 days, compared to \$726 total per trip for an average of 4.59 days for domestic visitors. Therefore, aligning with the Montana Travel Trade Office's focus on UK, Germany and Australia makes sense, when the time is right.

## EMERGING MARKETS

By the end of FY21, the Eastern Montana Tourism Initiative's astrotourism project will be complete, with Medicine Rocks State Park as the anchor site in Southeast Montana. This emerging market has strong viability with MRSP's new designation as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary. It makes sense that visitors will be traveling to ultra-rural areas for the darkest skies and best viewing and Visit Southeast Montana will continue to build on this market.

Considering the plethora of outdoor adventure opportunities, in FY22 Visit Southeast Montana will continue to look at mountain bikers and birders under the Outdoor Recreation Pillar as an emerging market. According to a 2011 study, birders spent \$15 billion on birding with 52% of those expenses spent on food and lodging. In Wyoming more than 60% of revenue from birding came from non-residents.

## POST PANDEMIC TRAVEL

As we experience the 2021 warm season “on the ground” and as we analyze our FY21 marketing efforts, we will keep our finger on the pulse of our target markets and continue to modify our work moving into FY22. At this time, we submit the following data (source: Destination Analysts) to support what Visit Southeast Montana expects to see.

### TRACKING THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF THE PANDEMIC ON TRAVEL AS OF MARCH 21, 2021

**58.1%**

Say the pandemic has changed their outlook on life



**41.8%**

Say the pandemic has changed their opinions about the types of leisure destinations they want to visit in the future



**72.7%**

Agree they will be more safety-conscious while traveling over the next few years



OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS, AS A DIRECT RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

**46.9%**

Agree that they will probably put more effort into visiting places on their travel bucket list



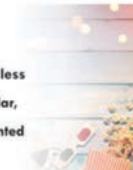
**52.2%**

Agree that they will be visiting more outdoor-oriented destinations



**44.6%**

Agree they will be less likely to visit popular, entertainment-oriented destinations



(Base: Wave 54 data. All respondents, 1,208 completed surveys. Data collected March 19-21, 2021)

Destination Analysts  
DO YOUR RESEARCH

In addition, while we expect a strong travel season in summer 2021, travelers do have expectations that their destinations are “safe.”

### TRAVEL SENTIMENT IN THE POST-VACCINE WORLD AS OF MARCH 28, 2021

**82.0%**

Comfortable with the Idea of Traveling after Receiving COVID-19 vaccine

“THERE IS NO NEED TO WEAR A MASK AFTER FULL VACCINATION”



“PROOF OF VACCINATION SHOULD BE REQUIRED FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL”

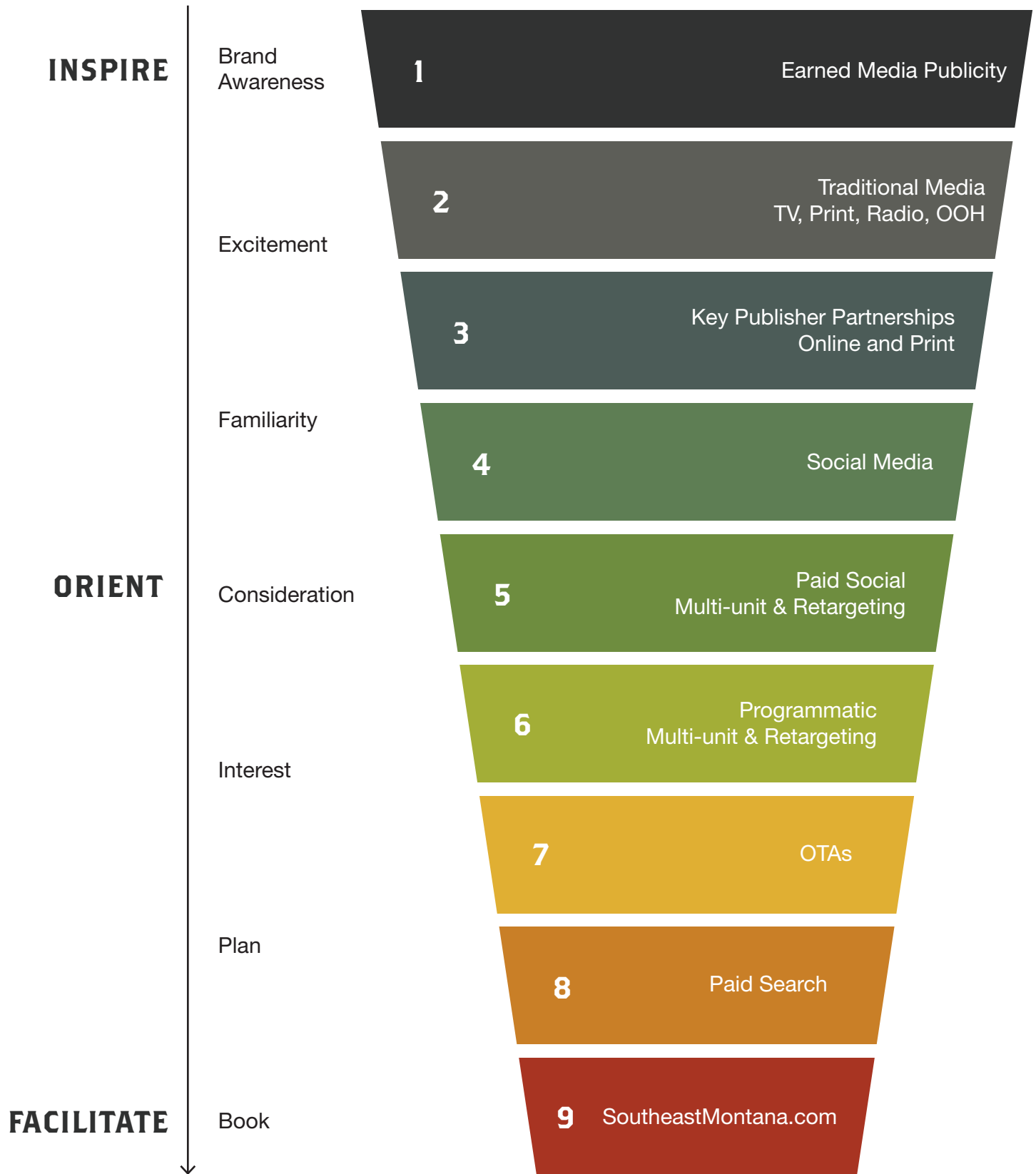


(Base: Wave 55 data. All respondents, 1,195 completed surveys. Data collected March 26-28, 2021)

Destination Analysts  
DO YOUR RESEARCH

In our role as information conduit, Visit Southeast Montana shares this evolving information with tourism partners via email, e-newsletters, webinars and in-person.







## STRATEGIC GOALS

### 1. GROW IN-REGION PARTNERSHIPS

A region as physically large as Southeast Montana is truly diverse, and as the foundation of Visit Southeast Montana, regional partners and stakeholders must be committed and strong. It is also within this diversity that the region's strength lies. In addition, as we pivot after COVID-19, being in tune with our tourism partners will be of utmost importance – as an “inventory” process (what products and services are available and how have they changed since the COVID crisis); as support; and as project partners.

During the CARES grant work of FY21, we learned the true value of our connections with stakeholders like chambers of commerce and economic development organizations. Continuing to foster those relationships is foundational for regional marketing to be successful.

To grow and further enhance those relationships, we will focus on:

#### FY22 ACTION

- A) Connect with more Tourism Partners and expanding the Tourism Partner circle to realize the full potential of strong relationships and seek partnerships to leverage budgets for marketing projects.
- B) Spend more quality time within the region, presenting Visit Southeast Montana's successes and emphasizing the advantages of working with the region on joint, no-cost ventures such as the website, authentic, fresh content, fairs and earned media. These quality interactions will also develop stronger inter-region communication to feed website, social media and earned media content.
- C) Evaluate Tourism Partner Workshop surveys from FY21 to develop additional, ready-to-implement topics and workshops for Partners. This year's six-week marketing workshop series is offered for one hour each week, via teleconference, and will incorporate those evaluations for future workshops.
- D) Reinforce Tourism Partners website, emphasizing the tools for Partners, such as ordering bulk guides, *News You Can Use* (eblasts) and no-cost business listings.



## FY22 MEASUREABLES

- A) Track number of presentations (plus attendance at each) to in-region partners such as chambers, civic groups and the like. Give 4 presentations in FY22. Leverage that time in region for content creation (social content, blogs, website information).
- B) Maintain open rate of 12.5% on *News You Can Use* (weekly e-newsletter).
- C) Conduct marketing workshop for Tourism Partners with total attendance of at least 42 partners.

## 2. DEVELOP AND EXPAND MARKETING PARTNERSHIPS

In the post-pandemic world, with budgets still a bit unpredictable, marketing efforts will be ultra-focused on partnerships. Rather than be an island looking for visitors, we will seek opportunities outside the region to facilitate and strengthen relationships with neighboring states, regions and DMOs along with MOTBD bureaus and programs, particularly as it pertains to tourism product development. This could be as simple as reinstating the cooperative marketing grants within the region. Additionally, we will:

### FY22 ACTION

- A) Invite other Montana regions and CVBs to collaborate on initiatives targeted specifically to the History Buff market (i.e. battlefields or Lewis & Clark sites) or outdoor recreation, if possible. While the MonDak Motorcycle Loop and astrotourism projects will be completed as per the Eastern Montana Tourism Initiative, Visit Southeast Montana will explore ways to continue these partnerships. In addition, Visit Southeast Montana will re-start work on the Trail to the Little Bighorn to create destinations within and spanning the region.
- B) Increase collaborative projects with Montana State Parks and/or Montana Dinosaur Trail, including advertising and/or earned media efforts or collaborate with a strong tourism partner to submit a grant application to MOTBD to leverage existing funds with matching funds.

## FY22 MEASUREABLES

- A) Produce (3) thematic-specific itineraries and/or blog posts (i.e. history) in collaboration with inter-region partners or with other regions. For example, astrotourism will be promoted as its own destination project but also promoted within Southeast Montana.
- B) Collaborate with Montana State Parks and/or Montana Dinosaur Trail to collaborate on at least (1) media opportunity or other destination project.

## 3. SUPPORT TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

We have identified weak infrastructure and lack of tourism product (such as trail rides, guided tours, dude ranches) as a weakness in the Southeast Montana region. Travelers expect the conveniences of home with an authentic yet urban edge to their experience. As thus, we will support the development of new tourism products, as allowed within regulations, plus share our knowledge, expertise and influence to move a project forward. Additionally, we will monitor legislative policies that could affect tourism.

### FY22 ACTION

- A) Review the established public policy statement with the Committee and across the region, specifically during presentations (see above).
- B) Seek projects that need assistance or development. For example, adding additional locations to the Trail to the Little Bighorn within the EMI project or referring a potential rancher to the agri-tourism contact with Great Northern Development Corporation to further the process.



- C) Ensure that all legislators and county commissions are included on the Master Spreadsheet, share *News You Can Use* and invite them to attend regional presentations.

## FY22 MEASUREABLES

- A) Share the public policy statement, which reflects Visit Southeast Montana's mission, with Tourism Partners via website and public presentations (as outlined in "Grow In-Region Partnerships" above).
- B) Complete the Trail to the Little Bighorn project.
- C) Participate in product development meetings and provide marketing expertise for projects like the Badlands to Badlands (working title) Trail, which proposes a link from Maah Daah Hey Trail in North Dakota to Makoshika State Park, and the Lower Yellowstone River Coalition project.
- D) Ask other partners, Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, for example to partner and offer Certified Interpretive Guide Training for regional partners as co-hosts.

## 4. PRODUCE QUALITY MARKETING INITIATIVES

Visit Southeast Montana's marketing methods will continue to follow the Inspiration-Orientation-Facilitation strategy outlined in this Marketing Plan. Post-COVID, the marketing landscape will look very different; it will need to be nimble for a newly-evolving target market. Based on behaviors defined during the pandemic, consumers will want reliable information from trusted brands. Most consumers expect to find that information digitally.

A key component will be an intense focus on earned media and authentic messaging integrated across multiple platforms. This seamless melding of messaging will be subtle but consistent from advertising, to social media, to branding and collateral, to media relations and appeal to the ever-changing global market.

## FY22 ACTIONS

- A) **MARKETING SUPPORT:** Visit Southeast Montana will continue to operate out of the shared offices in Billings; the close proximity to Visit Billings staff facilitates collaboration and promotion of Southeast Montana when larger groups and tours stop in Billings or with media groups that move through the region. When international travel resumes, we will continue to work with MOTBD's international market specialists to enhance the United Kingdom, German and Australian marketing efforts.

Within the region, we will continue to serve our tourism partners both formally and informally by being a strong and steady point of contact, sharing information from MOTBD along with social media opportunities, a quarterly newsletter and low-cost marketing strategies. Staff will support new tourism products that develop. For example, we will work with Venture Out, a business scheduled to open in Glendive that will rent kayaks, paddleboards and e-bikes, in addition to selling outdoor gear, by including their services during a fam tour or photo shoot; sharing Visit Southeast Montana's media list; including Venture Out's services in a thematic blog; and so forth.

- B) **PUBLICITY, SOCIAL MEDIA & MEDIA RELATIONS:** In the post-pandemic world of tourism marketing, we will continue to expand earned media in FY22, regionally, nationally and internationally, by selectively nurturing relationships, including publications/editors, freelancers and social influencers, that fit the Visit Southeast Montana pillars of outdoor recreation; western authenticity, historical adventure, dinosaur experiences and American Indian culture. These content creators will be restless from travel bans and eager to create new content for their dwindling stockpile. We'll start with a focus on the refined drive-market and expand into markets that match MOTBD's target market as budget allows. Cision (or similar earned media tracking & media/freelancer database service) is a key component to this strategy, as is utilizing staff's extensive journalism backgrounds.

During the FY21 CARES grant work, we saw a positive response to paid social ads on YouTube and Pinterest. Based on that experience, we will consider adding a social media channel to Visit Southeast Montana's social media organic, and possibly paid, mix.

Blog content continues to be vital and will be repurposed into regional news releases; guest blogs are also ways to extend the reach of paid content with all being shared across all of Visit Southeast Montana's platforms.



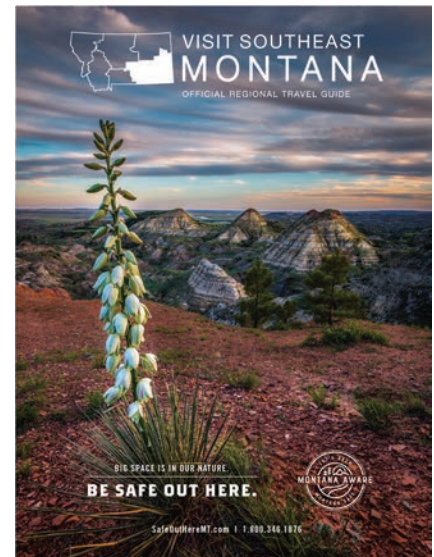
**C) CONSUMER ADVERTISING:** In FY22, we will utilize multi-media buys in the target markets, including digital, print and “advertorial” to promote warm season visitation. Based on web statistics, we have noticed a drastic drop in traffic as the campaign ends. To off-set that, we will implement a year-round paid social media campaign to keep the Visit Southeast Montana brand forefront and continue driving traffic to the website. We typically analyze FY21 paid media performance before drafting a new media plan – that is where the details and annual adjustments happen. We will also determine – based on many factors, including post-pandemic consumer behavior – if the “Out Here” campaign be modified and retained or if we will draft new creative for FY22.

**D) PHOTO LIBRARY:** Stunning imagery is a key element to the inspirational piece of the marketing funnel. Since FY19, we put a concerted effort into revitalizing the photo library, including making some photos available to Visit Southeast Montana’s tourism partners. Additionally, we shot video while on photo shoots, to further leverage that budget. In March, 2019 we launched a general inspirational video across all channels, which we then refined in FY20. In FY21 we used CARES grant funds to gather “safe” imagery. Moving into FY22, we will continue to expand the photo/video library as budget allows, with images and video that match the “We’re Big Out Here” campaign. These images will be used across all platforms including social, paid and earned media in addition to printed materials, tradeshow support, fairs (as requested), e-newsletters, blog posts and the ever-expanding website.



**E) PRINT PROJECTS:** The Visit Southeast Montana Travel Guide is the foundation of all marketing efforts—it tells the story of Southeast Montana. This piece has evolved from being a biannual guide with no advertising to an annual, private-fund project with a sophisticated magazine-style format. In FY22, we will again leverage private funds to produce and print the guide but use marketing funds to ship and distribute this keystone piece, which functions as the heart of SEMT's print collateral.

Additionally, we will develop and print other collateral to fit niche markets. For example, thematic itineraries, like history, as developed for the travel guide and website can also be printed for distribution via VICs or mailing. As budget allows, we will upgrade and redesign brochures and maps for emerging markets as determined by the post-pandemic traveler's preferences. Producing collateral across channels (print and digital) and in conjunction with other CVBs and/or Regions, further stretches marketing dollars.



**F) TELEMARKETING/FULFILLMENT:** The travel guides and other collateral must get into the hands of the traveler. To facilitate that, we have dedicated funds to fulfillment and distribution (contracts to be considered as they approach renewal dates). Additional collateral (such as thematic maps and itineraries) will be available from distribution centers, regional VICs and via download from the website. Tourism Partners can also order the travel guide in bulk.

**G) WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT AND OPTIMIZATION:** In FY18, Visit Southeast Montana's agency of record, Windfall, created a new website, which "scrapes" content from VisitMT.com but still allows for more creative and timely control at the region's level. In FY19 the website was further built out and optimized and we added the blog/e-newsletter component. Since FY20, we have continued to add to the site and traffic numbers continue to increase.

In FY22, we will continue to strengthen the site by updating and adding content, images and video, both via the blog and with more layers of information, keeping the site fresh and up-to-date, evolving as new tourism products develop. We will also incorporate, and further build out, the EMI projects into southeastmontana.com. Additionally, funds will be used to continually enhance SEO and other optimization techniques.

## FY22 MEASURABLES

- A) Host 3 media tours/social influencer visits.
- B) Increase social media numbers, i.e. followers, engagement, shares by 10%
- C) Establish new social channel on Pinterest and build base audience.
- D) Increase number of consumers in database by 5,000 and maintain open rate of 16% on consumer e-newsletters.
- E) Increase earned media with goal of 1 pitch/month, resulting in total of 8 national articles/segments and 15 regional articles/segments.
- F) Update website and increase traffic numbers by 20%.
- G) Establish CTR on digital media of .30%
- H) Run paid social media campaign year-round.

In summary, Visit Southeast Montana will pivot in the post-pandemic marketing landscape with a focus on being solid yet flexible and true to the Southeast Montana region. We will leverage increased earned media and publicity efforts with ultra-focused advertising in FY22 with the detailed marketing strategies outlined in this plan following the budget demonstrated below.

- Monitor and adjust for target audiences' geo-locations and post-pandemic behavior.
- Shift to emphasize the power of earned media in a post-pandemic world.
- Modify advertising to drive markets and expand as budget allows.
- Use skill-set of internal team to create stronger, more nimble, yet genuine content for cross-channel promotion.
- Continue to build-out and optimize southeastmontana.com as foundation of regional marketing.



TOTAL PROJECTED BUDGET FY 22:

**\$608,460**

PUBLICITY: \$25,200

CONSUMER: \$313,868

MARKETING SUPPORT: \$269,392

**\$269,392 (44%)**  
MARKETING SUPPORT

**\$25,200 (4%)**  
PUBLICITY

**\$10,000 (1.6%)**  
OPPORTUNITY MARKETING

**\$15,000 (2.5%)**  
VIC STAFF/CUSTOMER  
SERVICE TRAINING

**\$8,200 (1.3%)**  
FAM TRIPS

**\$5,000 (.8%)**  
SOCIAL MEDIA

**\$12,000 (2%)**  
PRESS PROMOTIONS  
/MEDIA OUTREACH

**\$4,000 (.07%)**  
OUTREACH

**\$2,500 (.04%)**  
TAC/GOVERNOR'S  
CONFERENCE MEETINGS

**\$5,000 (.08%)**  
COOPERATIVE MARKETING

**\$5,000 (.08%)**  
JOINT VENTURES

**\$109,400 (18%)**  
MARKETING/PUBLICITY  
PERSONNEL

**\$117,692 (19.3%)**  
ADMINISTRATION

**\$100 (.02%)**  
CRISIS MANAGEMENT

**\$100 (.02%)**  
RESEARCH

**\$100 (.02%)**  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

**\$42,100 (7%)**  
TRAVEL GUIDE

**\$36,500 (6%)**  
TRAVEL GUIDE

**\$313,868 (52%)**  
CONSUMER

**\$75,000 (12.3%)**  
AD AGENCY SERVICES

**\$134,768 (22.1%)**  
MULTI-MEDIA MARKETING

**\$10,000 (1.6%)**  
SOCIAL MEDIA

**\$3,500 (.06%)**  
ELECTRONIC  
ADV-NEWSLETTER,  
E-BLAST

**\$10,000 (1.6%)**  
PRINTED MATERIALS

**\$1,900 (.3%)**  
TRAVEL/TRADE SHOWS

**\$100 (.02%)**  
BILLBOARDS/OUT-OF-HOME

# VISIT SOUTHEAST MONTANA MARKETING PLAN BUDGET

July 1, 2021 – June 30, 2022

FY22 PROPOSED BUDGET	BUDGET
<b>CONSUMER ADVERTISING</b>	
Ad Agency Services	\$75,000
Printed Material	\$10,000
Billboards/Out of Home	\$100
Multi-Media Marketing	\$134,768
Social Media	\$10,000
Electronic Adv - Newsletter, E-Blast	\$3,500
Travel/Trade Shows	\$1,900
Travel Guide	\$36,500
Website/Internet Development/Updates	\$42,100
<b>Total Advertising</b>	<b>\$313,868</b>
<b>MARKETING SUPPORT</b>	
Administration	\$117,692
Marketing/Publicity Personnel	\$109,400
Joint Ventures	\$5,000
Cooperative Marketing (Grants)	\$5,000
TAC/Gov Conf/Meetings	\$2,500
Marketing Plan Development	\$500
Professional Development	\$100
Research	\$100
Outreach	\$4,000
VIC Staff/Customer Service Training	\$15,000
<b>Total Marketing Support</b>	<b>\$269,392</b>
<b>PUBLICITY</b>	
Fam Trips	\$8,200
Social Media	\$5,000
Press Promotions/Media Outreach	\$12,000
<b>Total Publicity</b>	<b>\$25,200</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$608,460</b>

**FY22 BUDGET**  
**TOTAL: \$608,460**

