

WHITEFISH MONTANA

EXPLORE WHITEFISH
WHITEFISH CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
FY24 ANNUAL PLAN
July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

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FY24 EXPLORE WHITEFISH ANNUAL PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Explore Whitefish strives to be a leading destination steward dedicated to sustainable tourism, balancing our economic and community sustainability while protecting our natural environment. Established by the City of Whitefish, Explore Whitefish is the officially designated organization charged with destination marketing and stewardship of Whitefish, also known as the Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau. The organization also provides critical support for visitor information services, travel infrastructure development, market research, community resources, strategic partnerships, crisis communications, and public relations.

Our Explore Whitefish team and board is made up of long-time residents who live and breathe the well-being of this community. We all want to preserve our community's livability. We are working hard every day to protect Whitefish, integrating sustainability into all our efforts.

We recognize the strain that increased summer visitation places upon our town. As such, Explore Whitefish supports business strategies that emphasize economic and social benefits to our community while maintaining the integrity of the place and quality of life of local residents. Our mission is to build a high level of awareness and intent to travel by developing support for Whitefish as a premier year-round mountain town. This includes increasing the occupancy for lodging facilities in Whitefish during lower occupancy times of the year. Explore Whitefish has also taken a lead in destination stewardship with the development and implementation of the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) which aims to balance the economic vitality of the tourism economy with social, community, and environmental benefits.

During FY22, Explore Whitefish formalized an updated mission and vision in order to integrate destination stewardship into the foundation of the organization.

Mission

Fostering sustainable tourism through inspiration, education, and partnerships to enhance, protect and preserve our viable year-round community.

Vision

Achieving long-term economic and community sustainability through steadfast destination stewardship.

In order for Explore Whitefish to effectively and strategically operate on our identified destination stewardship goals, the organization needs the ability to set aside funds to support these goals. During FY22, Explore Whitefish formalized the aforementioned updated mission and vision, which paved the way for the Community Sustainability Fund (CSF). In addition, the state rules and procedures for allowable Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax) expenditures were updated in FY23 in order to allow for more local investment of these funds. These two changes allowed the organization to diversify the annual budget across destination stewardship and destination marketing to truly work toward the ultimate goal of sustainable tourism.

Below you will find examples of some of the exciting destination stewardship initiatives, as well as a pie chart of the diversified FY24 public budget.

Education & Outreach

Explore Whitefish engages in various methods of outreach and support, including the "Be a Friend of The Fish" campaign, and the Grant Program, designed to provide members and Montana non-profit organizations with funds to help support sustainable business practices and invest in programs which benefit both visitors and residents during the shoulder and winter seasons.

Warm Season Visitor Education (Be a Friend of The Fish):

During the summer of 2021 and the extended warm season of 2022 (May 1 - September 30), Explore Whitefish executed a peak summer season outreach campaign called "Be a Friend of The Fish." This on-the-ground visitor education campaign is firmly rooted in community values and informed by the STMP plan. This campaign continued in FY23 and will be updated for FY24.

Sustainability Grant Program: This program is designed to provide Explore Whitefish business members who collect the CSF with support for programs and projects which facilitate sustainable business and community practices. Potential programs and projects include things like recycling and composting, but are certainly not limited to these areas. The Explore Whitefish Sustainability Grant Program is an extension of the very successful Explore Whitefish Community Enhancement Grant Program, which was established in FY19 to award funds to Explore Whitefish Business Members and Montana non-profit organizations to invest in projects, programs, and events which benefit both visitors and residents during the shoulder and winter seasons.

For The Love of The Wild: This campaign by Explore Whitefish offers education and inspiration for seasons when visitation is lowest, redirecting potential travelers away from the peak season.

Strategic Partnerships

Explore Whitefish seeks to create lasting impacts with local partnerships and national platforms. Building these partnerships will have a direct impact on community sustainability.

Housing Whitefish: *Want to Help Create Homes That People Can Afford?*

Explore Whitefish recognizes that one of the biggest challenges facing Whitefish is affordable housing. During FY22, Explore Whitefish began a financial partnership with Housing Whitefish in order to help tackle this issue. This partnership continued in FY23 and is slated to continue in FY24.

Protect Our Winters: *Help Passionate Outdoor People Protect the Places They Live and Love from Climate Change.*

Protect Our Winters is a nonprofit and international community of athletes, scientists, creatives, and business leaders advancing non-partisan policies that protect our world today and for future generations. Explore Whitefish and Whitefish Mountain Resort have become the first town/mountain partnership to support the mission of Protect our Winters.

Pledge for the Wild: *Help Support Responsible Recreation in Wild Places Surrounding Whitefish*

Explore Whitefish has partnered with Whitefish Legacy Partners and the national platform Pledge for the Wild, to proactively share responsible recreation tips while creating a direct channel for visitors to give back to local trail maintenance through online donation or text-to-donate.

Product Development

Explore Whitefish seeks to invest in local infrastructure which is beneficial to visitors and the local community. While this is a newly established allowable expenditure for Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax), Explore Whitefish has identified local infrastructure projects including updates and maintenance to the downtown Wifi Network (established by Explore Whitefish in FY19), Visitor Information Kiosks, Webcams, and Wayfinding System. In addition, there are plenty of potential projects which will be vetted during FY24. As an example, Explore Whitefish will pursue the opportunity to partner with the City of Whitefish to help facilitate long-term solutions to Bike-Ped connectivity in the downtown core.

1 WHITEFISH, MONTANA

Whitefish, Montana is an authentic mountain town located in the northern Rockies, home to some of the world's most beautiful mountains and spectacular, unspoiled nature. Just 25 miles from Glacier National Park, Whitefish offers close access to the hanging valleys and emerald peaks of this World Heritage Site. The summer season has historically been the busy season for Whitefish, with Glacier National Park as a key draw. Whitefish Lake, at the edge of town, has also been a popular warm season draw. Research also indicates that visitors are attracted to Whitefish because of the distinctive and inviting qualities of the eminently walkable downtown and Central Avenue district.

The world-class ski slopes and facilities of Whitefish Mountain Resort serve as a key driver for winter visitation to Whitefish. The relationship between the mountain resort and the town of Whitefish is symbiotic. As a result, improving and enhancing the connectivity of the mountain and the town experience helps improve the economic outcomes of both and improves the overall visitor experience as well. Whitefish Mountain Resort summer activities have expanded considerably over the last several years, improving the summertime vitality of the mountain resort experience as well as enhancing the overall attraction of Whitefish as the preferred place to base a northwest Montana and Glacier National Park region vacation.

1.1 ABOUT EXPLORE WHITEFISH & PURPOSE OF THIS ANNUAL PLAN

Established by the City of Whitefish, Explore Whitefish is the officially designated organization charged with destination marketing and stewardship of Whitefish, also known as the Whitefish Convention & Visitors Bureau. The organization also provides critical support for visitor information services, travel infrastructure development, market research, community resources, strategic partnerships, crisis communications, and public relations.

The purpose of the Explore Whitefish Annual Plan is to sustainably grow the economy of Whitefish by emphasizing its desirability as a travel and recreation destination to non-resident visitors who appreciate and respect the character of the place while reducing the negative impacts that visitation has on community quality of life.

We recognize the strain that increased summer visitation places upon our town. As such, Explore Whitefish supports business strategies that emphasize economic and social benefits to our community while maintaining the integrity of the place and quality of life of local residents. Our mission is to build a high level of awareness and intent to travel by developing support for Whitefish as a premier year-round mountain town. This includes increasing the occupancy for lodging facilities in Whitefish during lower occupancy times of the year. Explore Whitefish has also taken a lead in destination stewardship with the development and implementation of the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) which aims to balance the economic vitality of the tourism economy with social, community, and environmental benefits.

During FY22, Explore Whitefish formalized an updated mission and vision in order to integrate destination stewardship into the foundation of the organization.

Mission

Fostering sustainable tourism through inspiration, education, and partnerships to enhance, protect and preserve our viable year-round community.

Previous Version of Mission

Build a high level of visibility and increase our name recognition as a premier year-round destination.

Vision

Achieving long-term economic and community sustainability through steadfast destination stewardship.

Previous Version of Vision

Enhance the economy of Whitefish by emphasizing its desirability as a travel and recreation destination to visitors who appreciate and respect the character of place.

The Explore Whitefish FY22-24 Strategic Plan can be found in the Appendix.

1.2 KEY TRAVEL MOTIVATIONS FOR WHITEFISH, MONTANA

Summer occupancy is primarily driven by the town's proximity to Glacier National Park. The quality lodging opportunities, dining and nightlife possibilities coupled with the town's distinctive downtown environment have made Whitefish a preferred location to base a vacation to the Glacier National Park region. Summer visitation is also supported by the attractions of Whitefish Lake and the expanding attractions in addition to Glacier National Park including the Whitefish Trail and other recreational opportunities in and around town. The activities available at Whitefish Mountain Resort enhance the downtown shops, restaurants and galleries of the town itself. Many warm season festivals and events support the active and vibrant social environment of the town's core, which serves as a key visitor attraction.

Winter travel is primarily driven by the skiing and snowboarding opportunities at Whitefish Mountain Resort. However, this relationship has become increasingly symbiotic as winter visitors increasingly seek off-slope activities as part of their vacation. Winter experience in Glacier National Park, including cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and sightseeing are examples of unique off-slope activities increasingly promoted by Explore Whitefish. Furthermore, travel groups may include those who do not ski or snowboard. Good places to eat, active nightlife, shopping, arts and other winter sport activities, attractions, and events have become an increasingly important component of the overall winter vacation product mix.

Specific motivations for spring and fall season travel revolve around active experiences in and around Glacier National Park and Whitefish such as scenic driving, road biking, gravel riding, mountain biking, wildlife viewing, hiking, birding, golf, fly-fishing, non-motorized water sports, horseback riding and paddling. Cultural and culinary experiences such as dining, shopping at local shops, attending performing arts, and community events are also considered primary spring and fall activities for Whitefish. This includes traveling to Whitefish primarily for the purpose of relaxing, strolling the streets and shops and trying out great dining and nightlife options.

A full profile of Whitefish Nonresident Visitor Characteristics can be found in the Appendix.

1.3 STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF WHITEFISH RELATIVE TO OTHER DESTINATION MOUNTAIN TOWNS

STRENGTHS

- Whitefish aligns perfectly with the three Montana Brand pillars
 - More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48
 - Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders
 - Breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night
- Proximity to Glacier National Park — According to the National Park Service, visitors to Glacier National Park spent an estimated \$384 million in local gateway communities during 2021. An estimated \$158 million of those dollars were spent on lodging, comprising the highest percentage of expenditure at 41% of the total expenditures. Visitors spent an estimated \$63.0 million on restaurants, comprising the second highest

percentage of expenditures at 16% of the total expenditures. Visitation to Glacier National Park dropped slightly from 2021 but continued to be very strong with approximately 2.9 million visitors in 2022. The expanded ticketed entry system combined with the latest ever opening date for Going-to-the-Sun Road contributed to park visitation being down approximately 5.6% in 2022. While visits through the first three months of 2022 were down -16% compared to winter of 2021, visits were up +23% compared to the first three months of 2019 (pre-pandemic).

- Downtown Whitefish and the alluring character of the town's built environment — Research indicates that visitors are attracted to the character and scale of Whitefish, especially the town's Central Avenue district. These are attributes that form the foundation of the town's appeal to visitors who stay in, or around the community, eat at the town's various restaurants, and shop at local stores. Additional amenities such as pedestrian friendly sidewalks, miles of bike and pedestrian trails and ability to see the night's sky all add to the Whitefish character.
- Access to recreational activities — A wide variety of recreational opportunities in and around Whitefish is a major draw for visitors. These include Whitefish Mountain Resort, the Whitefish Trail, Whitefish Lake Golf Club, Whitefish Lake, and the Whitefish River, as well as the trails, rivers and scenic roadways in and around Glacier National Park.

CHALLENGES

- Short Term Rentals — As of February 24, 2023, AirDNA research, the subscription for which is paid for by Explore Whitefish in partnership with Brand Montana, shows that there were approximately 524 active rental properties within City Limits and a total of 1,269 active rentals within the Whitefish Zip Code (59937) during the 4th Quarter of 2022. These numbers are approximate and a few redundancies may exist. For perspective, the active listings within city limits (approximately 524) average 2.3 bedrooms. That equates to roughly 1,200 guest rooms which is close to the number of traditional lodging guest rooms in town, effectively doubling the overnight lodging capacity within the City of Whitefish. In terms of the Whitefish Zip Code (59937), short term rentals (1,269 active listings including listings within the City) average 2.6 bedrooms which equates to 3,300 guest rooms. By this calculation, there are more than twice as many short term rental guest rooms as traditional lodging guest rooms within the full Whitefish Zip Code. This impacts our community in a variety of ways: 1) impacts to the inventory of housing for local residents, 2) illegal rentals and those without business licenses who are not collecting the Whitefish Resort Tax or the Lodging Facility Use Tax, 3) direct competition for Whitefish lodging properties who are directly employing the local workforce, 4) adding a substantial amount of guest rooms which are now filled during the summer season, which was already at capacity.
- Highly Seasonal Visitation Patterns — Visitation patterns to Whitefish are highly seasonal with the majority of visitation occurring during the high demand months of July and August. This seasonality impacts the operating effectiveness of Whitefish businesses that must accommodate these aforementioned demand swings.
- Limited Transportation Infrastructure — Public transportation options, particularly from the Flathead Valley to Glacier National Park and from Whitefish to Glacier Park International Airport are fewer than those provided at competitor destinations.
- Limited Access To The Going-to-the-Sun Road — The Whitefish summer tourism season is directly tied to the opening and closing dates for automobiles on the alpine section of the Going-to-the-Sun Road in Glacier National Park. Delayed openings and early fall closures due to weather or road construction directly impacts visitation to Whitefish during that period, concentrating visitation in the already overcrowded months of July and August.
- Uncertain Weather — During some years, low snow levels in the winter hamper winter visitation and spending, while summer fire seasons affect willingness for visitors to travel in summer and fall.
- Market Perception — Research performed by Brand Montana in key destination markets reveals that Montana is perceived to offer lower quality amenities and services to visitors. While Montanans are perceived as being friendly, it should be distinguished that this friendliness does not automatically translate into a guest's perception of a high level of service.
- Lack of Competitive Pricing for Air Access and Limited Seats Outside of Summer Season — When compared to mountain communities with which Whitefish competes for destination visitors, airline seats to Glacier Park International Airport are limited outside of the summer season, with fewer flights, limited markets and higher fares. Within the state, deboardings at Glacier Park International Airport (412,609 in 2022) accounted for 17% of the total deboardings in the state, slightly ahead of Missoula (16%) and Billings

(14%). Bozeman continues to dominate airport deboardings with 44% of the total share in 2022.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Invest in local infrastructure and build partnerships which have a direct impact on community sustainability.
 - Reach peak season visitors by educating them with responsible travel messaging during their stay in Whitefish and the surrounding area.
 - Collaborate with local stakeholders, Glacier National Park, regional, and state tourism partners to develop and build out support for shoulder season visitation, and to communicate sustainable visitor practices with visitors during the peak season.
 - Highly seasonal visitation patterns allow for the ability to increase lodging occupancy and visitor expenditures during the shoulder and winter seasons through Explore Whitefish marketing efforts.
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2 WHITEFISH, MONTANA AND THE MONTANA BRAND

Whitefish aligns perfectly with the Montana Brand pillars. In order to inspire visitors, we serve up beautiful high resolution photos of the scenic beauty and incredible nature that surrounds us. Photos of our iconic downtown are an important part of our collateral. Visitors are very attracted to our downtown and it is a primary economic driver for the town. In addition, we try to counter the preconceived notions that Montana is remote and does not have adequate facilities by showcasing the beautiful lodging and incredible dining that can be found here.

While the incredible scenic and wild landscapes that surround Whitefish are a key and compelling inspiration to travel to Whitefish, these landscapes are placed in the context of hospitality. The broad majority of travelers are intimidated by wildness without the tempering possibility of civilization. Beyond the adventure of wilderness by day, they want a good place to eat and a comfortable place to sleep. We utilize the Montana Brand pillars in unison to create this cohesive and encompassing Whitefish experience which is communicated in our marketing efforts.

- More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48
 - Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders
 - Breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality at night
-

3 STRATEGIC ROLE: DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

The Whitefish Sustainable Management Plan Committee was formed in 2018 as a volunteer committee of the City of Whitefish and in partnership with Explore Whitefish. Over the course of the next few years, the committee gathered information from public meetings and worked with consultants and Explore Whitefish to create the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, approved by Whitefish City Council in September 2020.

Explore Whitefish has taken action by identifying specific destination stewardship goals in the FY24 Annual Plan which came directly from the STMP. These include taking the lead on outreach segments of the STMP to reinforce positive visitor behaviors, build awareness and influence visitor behavior related to recreating responsibly, leave no trace, traveling safely around wildlife and wildfire mitigation, etc. Particular focus is given to stewardship messaging in the warm season. Moving into FY24 and beyond, Explore Whitefish remains committed to weaving the tenets of the STMP into our campaigns and actions.

3.1 DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP GOALS

Explore Whitefish strives to be a leading destination steward dedicated to sustainable tourism, balancing our economic

and community sustainability while protecting our natural environment.

The Explore Whitefish Strategic Plan FY22-24 identifies the overarching goal of destination stewardship:

GOAL: Invest in Whitefish through community engagement and sustainable tourism efforts.

SUBSET OF DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP GOALS

Focus on implementation of the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) and integration into the Whitefish Brand

- Build partnerships which have a direct impact on community sustainability.
- Invest in local infrastructure which is beneficial to the local community and visitors.
- Co-lead the implementation of a Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) in conjunction with the Whitefish STMP Committee and City of Whitefish.

In order to achieve the goals of destination stewardship, our strategies, objectives and tactics are described below:

3.2 TARGET AUDIENCE & CORE GEOGRAPHIC MARKET: DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

Explore Whitefish Destination Stewardship efforts are designed to reach on-the-ground visitors, with particular emphasis on the warm season. However, the message is ultimately designed to inspire and resonate year-round. Destination Stewardship efforts also benefit the local community through impactful partnerships and programs to enhance liveability and protect the natural environment of Whitefish.

3.3 SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Destination stewardship is defined by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) as a process by which the public sector, private sector, and the residents of the local community are engaged jointly to preserve, protect, and benefit from visitors to their destination.

The purpose of the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan is to promote sustainable community-based tourism development that is beneficial to community members, employees, and visitors. The key pillars of the plan are: community character, livability, and community engagement. The executive summary and full plan is available at SustainableWhitefish.com.

In order for Explore Whitefish to effectively and strategically operate on our identified destination stewardship goals, the organization needs the ability to set aside funds to support these goals. During FY22, Explore Whitefish formalized an updated mission and vision in order to integrate destination stewardship into the foundation of the organization (see Section 1.1), which paved the way for the Community Sustainability Fund (CSF). In addition, the state rules and procedures for allowable Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax) expenditures were updated for FY23 in order to allow for more local investment of these funds.

These two changes allowed the organization to diversify the annual budget across destination stewardship and destination marketing to truly work toward the ultimate goal of sustainable tourism.

Community Sustainability Fund 1% (PRIVATE Budget): A 1% fee, currently known as the Community Sustainability Fund (CSF), is added to lodging, restaurants, and transportation receipts by member businesses. The 1% CSF fee is a voluntary contribution to support our programs that balance economic and community sustainability in Whitefish while maintaining the integrity of our town and the quality of life for local residents.

These funds support vital programs including the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan, Explore Whitefish Grant Programs, Affordable Housing Partnership with Housing Whitefish, and the "Be a Friend of The Fish" education campaign. The CSF also funds the Crisis Communications Partnership with the City of Whitefish, which provides community and business resources through pandemic and wildfire communications and other emergent needs.

Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax) (PUBLIC Budget):

During FY23, the state rules and procedures for allowable Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax) expenditures were updated to allow for more local investment of these funds. Multiple examples are listed below which Explore Whitefish added to the FY23 budget. In FY24, Explore Whitefish will be actively pursuing more opportunities for product development in our community.

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Development or implementation of visitor amenities that enhance the visitor experience. Up to, but not exceeding, 35% of the organization's annual budget may be designated to this method. Explore Whitefish will assess the community's needs to enhance the visitor experience and all projects must have Explore Whitefish board approval.

- Visitor Amenities include items such as VIC enhancements and improvements, visitor kiosks, visitor information, responsible recreation resources, cultural tourism, visitor signage and wayfinding, visitor amenities, transit center enhancements, bicycle/pedestrian amenities, visitor restroom enhancements, etc.
- Visitor Amenities must be owned by a qualifying government entity, tribal government, or nonprofit organization. Funds are not to be used for major construction, utilities or underground infrastructure.

OUTREACH/EDUCATION

- Educational Programs, Trainings, Workshops, Conferences and Professional Development.
- Must be State sponsored VIC staff training or Explore Whitefish approved customer service training.

3.4 OUTREACH & EDUCATION

Explore Whitefish engages in various methods of outreach and support, including the "Be a Friend of The Fish" campaign, and the Grant Program, designed to provide members and Montana non-profit organizations with funds to help support sustainable business practices and invest in programs which benefit both visitors and residents during the shoulder and winter seasons.

More information on outreach, education, and support can be found below.

Warm Season Visitor Education (Be a Friend of The Fish):

During the summer of 2021 and the extended warm season of 2022 (May 1 - September 30), Explore Whitefish executed a peak summer season on-the-ground outreach campaign called "Be a Friend of The Fish." This included, but was not limited to, downtown banners, airport displays, rack cards, travel guide information, paid owned channel ads (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) and streaming ads on Spotify. We plan to continue this campaign during the FY23 warm season, as well as in the FY24 warm season.

This peak season on-the-ground visitor education campaign is firmly rooted in the community values developed during the creation of the initial COVID safety-focused 'Be A Friend Of The Fish' campaign and informed by the STMP plan.

Be A Friend Of The Fish: Community Values

Take it Slow. Enjoy the Ride

- Slow down and take a deep breath. Enjoy and notice the quiet pace of life in Whitefish and the beauty that surrounds all of us in every moment.
- Walk, ride, or hop on the S.N.O.W bus before you drive.

Recreate Responsibly

- Recreate responsibly, be prepared for anything, and have a backup plan.
- Wait for fall, winter or spring to visit. Experience natural beauty with less crowds.

Be a Steward of the Land

- Protect public lands, respect private lands, and always give wildlife the right of way.

- Recycle and be responsible with your waste (TP too). Leave No Trace!
- Share your photos responsibly. Preserve the landscape rather than piling up “likes.”

Show Respect and Kindness

- Ignite inclusive conversations and show mutual respect for locals and visitors.

Fuel our Local Businesses

- Fuel up at local businesses. Our merchants, restaurants and hotels rely on your support!

Help us Stay Healthy

- Help us all stay healthy by observing local health guidelines.

The campaign can be seen at FriendofTheFish.com

Explore Whitefish Grant Programs:

Sustainability Grant Program: The Explore Whitefish Sustainability Grant Program was new for FY23. This program is designed to provide Explore Whitefish business members who collect the Community Sustainability Fund with support for programs and projects which facilitate sustainable business and community practices. Potential programs and projects could include recycling and composting, but are certainly not limited to these areas. The Explore Whitefish Sustainability Grant Program is an extension of the very successful Explore Whitefish Grant Program, now referred to as the Community Enhancement Grant Program.

Community Enhancement Grant Program: The Explore Whitefish Community Enhancement Grant Program was established in FY19 to award funds to Explore Whitefish Business Members and Montana non-profit organizations to invest in projects, programs, and events which benefit both visitors and residents during the shoulder and winter seasons. Through December of FY23, the fifth year of the Explore Whitefish Grant Program, \$49,906 has been awarded. An example of a recent sustainability grant recipient is the Lodge at Whitefish Lake for the installation of bear-proof trash bins on their property.

Voices of Montana Tourism: On a yearly basis, Explore Whitefish partners with the statewide nonprofit Voices of Montana Tourism to build awareness of the importance of the tourism industry to Montana's economy while instilling respect for the industry and those who work in the tourism industry. Success is measured through the mission and work of Voices of Montana Tourism, including their local, regional, and statewide presentations to Montana residents, businesses, and elected officials.

Visitor Fulfillment: Explore Whitefish uses a number of visitor fulfillment tools in order to provide inspirational and educational content around sustainability. These tools include the website, toll-free visitor information phone number, local and regional visitor information centers, display racks at local businesses, and the seven visitor information kiosks located in town and at Glacier Park International Airport. These tools are important to help connect visitors with our Travel Guide and locator map highlighting our local business as well as educating visitors once they are here on how to “Be A Friend of The Fish.” In FY24, Explore Whitefish will supply approximately 25,000 Whitefish Travel Guides and between 50,000-75,000 Whitefish Town Maps.

More information on the visitor fulfillment strategy can be found in the travel planning funnel under the Appendix.

Destination Stewardship: Outreach, Education, Partnerships, and Support

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Invest in programs and projects which facilitate sustainable business and community practices.	Successful completion of the Explore Whitefish Sustainability Grant Program

Build awareness and influence visitor behavior related to recreating responsibly, leave no trace, traveling safely around wildlife and wildfire mitigation, etc. Particular focus is given to the warm season (May 1 - Sept. 30)	Successfully execute the “Be a Friend of The Fish” campaign. Conduct a perception study for on the ground visitors.
Build awareness of the importance of the tourism industry to Montana's economy while instilling respect for the industry and those who work in the tourism industry	Success is measured through the mission and work of Voices of Montana Tourism, including their local, regional, and statewide presentations
Attend all required meetings of the Tourism Advisory Council (TAC) as well as the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Recreation	Explore Whitefish staff reports on new resources, information, research, best practices, and marketing updates which were obtained through the meetings

3.5 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Explore Whitefish seeks to create lasting impacts with local partnerships and national platforms. Building these partnerships will have a direct impact on community sustainability.

More information on partnerships can be found below.

Housing Whitefish: *Want to Help Create Homes That People Can Afford?*

Explore Whitefish recognizes that one of the biggest challenges facing Whitefish is affordable housing. During FY22, Explore Whitefish began a financial partnership with Housing Whitefish in order to help tackle this issue. This partnership is continuing in FY23 and FY24

Protect Our Winters: *Help Passionate Outdoor People Protect the Places They Live and Love from Climate Change.*

Protect Our Winters is a nonprofit and international community of athletes, scientists, creatives, and business leaders advancing non-partisan policies that protect our world today and for future generations. Explore Whitefish and Whitefish Mountain Resort have become the first town/mountain partnership to support the mission of Protect our Winters.

Leave No Trace: *ensure a sustainable future for the outdoors and the planet*

Leave No Trace is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing Leave No Trace programs, education, training and outreach in all 50 states and more than 100 countries around the globe. Utilizing the power of science, education for all, and stewardship to support and protect nature, Leave No Trace is on a mission to ensure a sustainable future for the outdoors and the planet.

Pledge for the Wild: *Help Support Responsible Recreation in Wild Places Surrounding Whitefish*

The Whitefish community has banded together to permanently protect the open lands that surround us. The Whitefish Trail is the anchor project of Whitefish Legacy Partners and is the result of community collaboration to preserve clean water, public access, recreation, thriving forests, uncluttered views and wildlife.

Starting in FY21, Explore Whitefish has partnered with Whitefish Legacy Partners and the national platform Pledge for the Wild, to proactively share responsible recreation tips while creating a direct channel for visitors to give back to local trail maintenance through online donation or text-to-donate. Signage at select trailheads of the Whitefish Trail as well as posters in downtown kiosks, posters for businesses, and coasters have been distributed as part of this partnership.

More information can be found at: PledgeWild.com/Whitefish-MT

3.6 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Explore Whitefish seeks to invest in local infrastructure which is beneficial to visitors and the local community. While this is a newly established allowable expenditure for Lodging Facility Use Tax (Bed Tax), Explore Whitefish has identified the following local infrastructure projects.

Identified projects: Updates and maintenance to the downtown Wifi Network (established by Explore Whitefish in FY19), Visitor Information Kiosks, Webcams, Whitefish Wayfinding Signage.

There are many potential projects which are being vetted during FY24. This could include, but is certainly not limited to, bear proof trash containers for businesses, enhanced bus stops and/or transportation depot for the SNOW Bus, and bike/pedestrian improvements to the downtown transportation infrastructure. Explore Whitefish recognizes that one of the biggest challenges we face is limited transportation infrastructure in our region.

Destination Stewardship: Product Development

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Identify local partnerships for projects with enhance infrastructure for visitors and the local community	Projects and partners identified.
Invest in local infrastructure projects which are beneficial to visitors and the local community.	Successfully allocation of product development funds.
Complete identified projects during the fiscal year	Successful completion of projects

3.7 PUBLIC RELATIONS: COMMUNICATIONS & SUSTAINABILITY

STRATEGY

The Explore Whitefish contracted PR agency works directly with editors, writers, bloggers, photographers, videographers, and digital influencers to support and produce stories, photography, and videos supporting the Explore Whitefish brand. Based on the recent adoption of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP), and the updated mission and vision of Explore Whitefish, the PR program is focused on earning media placement in the outlined Explore Whitefish target audiences incorporating sustainable visitation. All current media pitches are focused on sustainability, as well as education on how to recreate responsibly using best safety practices. This message will be a priority for the foreseeable future.

Brand management has also taken a central role in communications as Explore Whitefish continues to shape and communicate its vision for destination stewardship and sustainable community-based tourism development that is beneficial to community members and visitors. Retaining and communicating community character, livability, and engagement are the top priorities.

The PR team also supports the Explore Whitefish Athlete Sponsorship Program by negotiating, coordinating, and executing on annual deliverables. One of the FY23 deliverables for the Maggie Voisin sponsorship program included continued participation in the Explore Whitefish Friend of the Fish Campaign as well as being an athlete voice for the new Protect Our Winters partnership and “75 Years” short film to raise awareness about climate change and help empower people to protect their communities, lifestyles, and livelihoods from a warming planet.

A portion of the PR efforts continues to focus on crafting and effectively implementing crisis communication strategies for both brand and community protection. These occur in partnership with the City of Whitefish, strategic DMO partners (Brand Montana, Glacier Country, and Discover Kalispell, for example), and local land managers. Crisis PR efforts also include outreach to media and messages through WCVB communication channels (website, social media, e-news, etc.). Topics in this area have been related to environmental events like wildfires, issues surrounding hate and extremist’s threats, marches, and terrorism, and of course, the global pandemic. Timely and effective messaging can influence consumer travel decisions, mitigate cancellations, and provide guidance for safe travel for those planning a trip. Crisis communications, or lack thereof, can significantly contribute to positive or negative factors affecting the short and long term economy and community health of Whitefish.

Additional information on the PR program can be found in the Appendix

Destination Stewardship: Communications & Sustainability

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Stimulate the publication of feature stories in national and regional publications, digital media, and broadcast media. Pitch media coverage to include topics such as recreating responsibly, leave no trace, traveling safety around wildlife, wildfire mitigation, etc.	Use Meltwater to track stories, audience reach, and advertising value equivalency.
Taking the lead on outreach segments of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) to build awareness and influence visitor behavior, with particular focus on the peak summer season.	Successful execution of the Friend of the Fish Campaign.
Encouraging use of public transportation, and supporting local industry by staying in hotels or lodges.	Work with STMP Committee and the successful execution of the Friend of the Fish Campaign.

3.8 RESEARCH

In order to better understand trends and gauge the effectiveness of our destination stewardship and destination marketing efforts, Explore Whitefish will take part in research. Explore Whitefish is currently partnering with Smith Travel Research, Sprout Social, Meltwater, and ITRR. Explore Whitefish and in additional cooperative research projects, such as VisaVue and AirDNA with Brand Montana. The research cooperative opportunities offered by Brand Montana, including VisaVue and AirDNA, have been invaluable in helping us to measure visitor spending to Whitefish, particularly within our stated target markets, as well as to closely monitor our seasonal trends and the effects of short term rentals.

Destination Stewardship: Outreach, Education, Partnerships, and Support

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Obtain visitor expenditure and visitation data, social media audience performance, and earned media value which all help to evaluate marketing performance, monitor seasonal visitation expenditures and target markets, and help inform future stewardship and marketing strategies.	Acquire data through various research platforms such as VisaVue, AirDNA, Smith Travel, Sprout Social, and Meltwater. ITRR?

4 STRATEGIC ROLE: DESTINATION MARKETING

4.1 DESTINATION MARKETING GOALS

Explore Whitefish strives to sustainably maintain the economy of Whitefish by emphasizing its desirability as a travel and recreation destination outside the summer months to non-resident visitors who appreciate and respect the character of the place. This specifically prioritizes increasing the occupancy for lodging facilities during lower occupancy times of the year.

The Explore Whitefish Strategic Plan FY22-24 identifies the overarching goal of destination marketing:

GOAL: Raise awareness of Whitefish as a travel destination and drive visitation during the non-peak seasons

SUBSET OF DESTINATION MARKETING GOALS

- Support the brand identity and presence of Whitefish, Montana in the marketplace as a destination for

active experience-seeking travelers.

- Encourage destination visitation from the core geographic markets.
- Position Whitefish as the basecamp for Glacier National Park visitors with the natural, cultural, and culinary assets of Whitefish.

In order to achieve the goals of destination marketing, strategies, objectives and tactics are described below:

4.2 DESTINATION MARKETING: THE TRAVEL DECISION FUNNEL

Whitefish follows the basic travel decision funnel:

- **Inspiration** – Sparking an interest and inspiring a traveler to visit Whitefish
- **Orientation** – Helping the visitor learn about where Whitefish is, how to get here, what facilities and activities are available for their travel
- **Facilitation** – Helping to connect visitors with specific businesses and activities to make a reservation and solidify their travel plans into a quality experience once here

All marketing efforts feed into this funnel and resolve to digital tools, travel guides and additional visitor information that help connect visitors from spark of inspiration to actual business transactions at the local level. These tools include the website at ExploreWhitefish.com, the Whitefish Travel Guide, social media channels, visitor information kiosks, and wayfinding maps throughout town. These tools are important to help connect visitors with local business as well as help visitors have a great experience once they are here. If we inspired a visit, did nothing for the visitor once they arrived, and were reluctant to provide tools that help the visitor discover what to do, the visitor would be more likely to miss the quality experiences that would cause them to want to return.

See full explanation of the travel planning funnel under the Appendix.

4.3 TARGET AUDIENCE: PREFERRED VISITORS TO WHITEFISH, MONTANA

Our preferred visitors are targeted by geographic location, demographic characteristics, and values that distinguish our overall potential visitor as a “high potential visitor” and “winter enthusiast” (as defined by research conducted by Destination Analysts) and our niche visitor as a “geotraveler” (as defined by research conducted by ITRR, the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) and the National Geographic Society). The following section provides information on the distinguishing characteristics of potential visitors defined by Brand Montana along with the core geographic markets for Whitefish.

WHITEFISH VISITOR: GEOTRAVELERS

Geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographic character of the place being visited including its environment, culture, heritage, landmarks and the well-being of its residents. According to the ITRR study, “Statewide Vacationers to Montana: Are They Geotravelers,” the strong geotraveler spent the most money per day while traveling in Montana (\$141.79) followed by the moderate geotraveler (\$134.10) and the non geotraveler vacationer spent (\$133.27). Visitors who agreed with the principles of geotourism spend more money per day while traveling in Montana than non- geotravelers. A 2016 ITRR Study, “The Importance of Traveler Spending on Locally Produced Goods & Services,” further examined geotraveler spending. The results of this study showed that visitor groups who purchased “Made in Montana ” products, items from local farmers’ markets, and who used local guides and outfitters spent \$184.76 more per stay than visitors who did not purchase these products and services.

Geotravelers are low impact, high value visitors who appreciate the unique characteristics and natural values of the places they visit. They place a high value on authentic travel experiences that respect and support the local character of place and its environment, and are less likely to become discouraged in their travel experiences by travel distances, difficulties and variable weather, especially during the shoulder seasons.

Values – Creative, curious, connected, engaged, adventurous, independent, mindful.

Source: Geotraveler Exploratory, Alexis Sanford, 2008.

Attitudes – Immerse yourself in the culture, go off the beaten trail, get out of your comfort zone, allow

for spontaneity, take a risk, pay attention, go now.

Source: Geotraveler Exploratory, Alexis Sanford, 2008.

- A segment of the U.S. total travel market estimated to include over 55 million people.
- They seek authenticity in travel experiences.
- They seek out opportunities to experience businesses and activities that are locally unique.
- Travel is an important part of their “lifestyle” and they often combine learning with travel.
- They spent a disproportionate amount of their income on travel compared to other travelers.
- They are more likely to be aware of their own impact, both environmental and community, on the places they are visiting.

4.4 CORE GEOGRAPHIC MARKETS

Explore Whitefish will focus its attention during this fiscal period on low impact, high value potential visitors who match the geotraveler profile in the following geographic markets. It is possible that opportunities will arise in additional markets in partnership with other tourism organizations, such as Brand Montana. In these instances, Explore Whitefish may extend its efforts beyond these core focus markets.

- **Seattle, Washington (Puget Sound Area)** – Seattle and the Puget Sound area have been historically strong markets for Whitefish. The existence of the Amtrak train route has made this connection logical, as well as daily direct flights. Explore Whitefish invests in digital campaigns in this market as well as actively cooperating with Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR) on multi-channel marketing campaigns.
- **Portland, Oregon** – The existence of the Amtrak train route has made this connection logical, as well as seasonal direct flights and short connecting flights the rest of the year. Explore Whitefish invests in digital campaigns in this market as well as actively cooperating with Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR) on multi-channel marketing campaigns.
- **Chicagoland (Chicago core and northern suburbs to Madison, Wisconsin)** – Explore Whitefish and Whitefish Mountain Resort have collaborated with Glacier AERO since 2014 on direct winter service to Chicago. In the past two years, this service has continued without a Minimum Revenue Guarantee (MRG) which is how shoulder season success of air service is measured by Glacier AERO. A significant expansion of seats for warm season service have also been added in recent years as well as multiple carriers now flying this route daily direct seasonally.
- **Minneapolis, Minnesota** – This has been a historically strong market for Whitefish in terms of visitation and ease of travel due to daily direct flights and Amtrak service.
- **California (San Francisco/Oakland & Los Angeles)** – Although California consistently ranks as a top market of visitors to Whitefish, the addition of enhanced direct air service has made California a core geographic market for Explore Whitefish.
- **Regional Drive-To (including Spokane, Coeur D’Alene, British Columbia)** – Explore Whitefish invests in regional drive-to markets as these potential visitors have the ability to travel on short notice, particularly during the shoulder seasons. Although the amount of investment is significantly smaller than the aforementioned core geographic markets, we believe it is important to continue to raise awareness and intent to travel in these regional drive-to markets.
- **Alberta** – As a historically strong market for Whitefish, Alberta has recently been added back into the list of core markets after the decline in visitation due to the border closure during the pandemic. Awareness of Whitefish as a premier travel destination has been well established and the fluctuations in currency exchange play the single biggest factor in increased or decreased visitation and expenditures to Whitefish.
- **Dallas** - Google Analytics, booking and spend data all point to Dallas being an important market to Whitefish, particularly during shoulder seasons. Thus, it is the newest market to be targeted with digital marketing efforts.

ESTABLISHED GEOGRAPHIC MARKET

Explore Whitefish has identified the following established geographic market due to current and historic visitation numbers, as well as historical investment in marketing. Although this market is very important from a visitation perspective, Explore Whitefish is currently choosing to invest in the core geographic markets identified above as having the largest potential for growth.

- **Missoula/WesternMT** – Missoula and Western Montana (beyond a 50-mile radius outside of Whitefish) has been a historically strong market for Whitefish in terms of visitation and ease of travel due to proximity to Whitefish. The ability to make short shoulder season trips and last minute trips makes this market desirable.

4.5 SUPPORTING RESEARCH (LODGING OCCUPANCY & NONRESIDENT SPENDING)

Whitefish experiences an uneven cycle of visitation with a busy summer season that operates with high lodging occupancy. Deep shoulder seasons include early spring and late autumn, with moderate visitor activity during the winter season. Higher winter activity and occupancy exists during the Christmas holiday period and also during select holiday periods throughout the ski season. Therefore, we focus our marketing efforts on the shoulder and winter season in our stated target markets in order to increase lodging occupancy and visitor expenditures.

Explore Whitefish acquires lodging occupancy and nonresident spending data in order to inform our marketing efforts. Quarterly and yearly information from the last year can be found below.

WHITEFISH CITY LIMITS AVERAGE LODGING OCCUPANCY BY QUARTER: 2022 VS. 2021

Source: SMITH TRAVEL RESEARCH, Calendar Year 2022 Compared to 2021

- January - March: 47.0% (+11.2%)
- April - June: 60.0% (-1.64%)
- July - September: 78.0% (-2.66%)
- October - December: 48.9% (+2%)
- Calendar Year 2021 Average Lodging Occupancy: 58.47% (+1.1%)

WHITEFISH SHORT TERM RENTAL CITY LIMITS AVERAGE LODGING OCCUPANCY BY QUARTER: 2021 VS 2019

Source: AirDNA, Calendar Year 2022 Compared to 2021

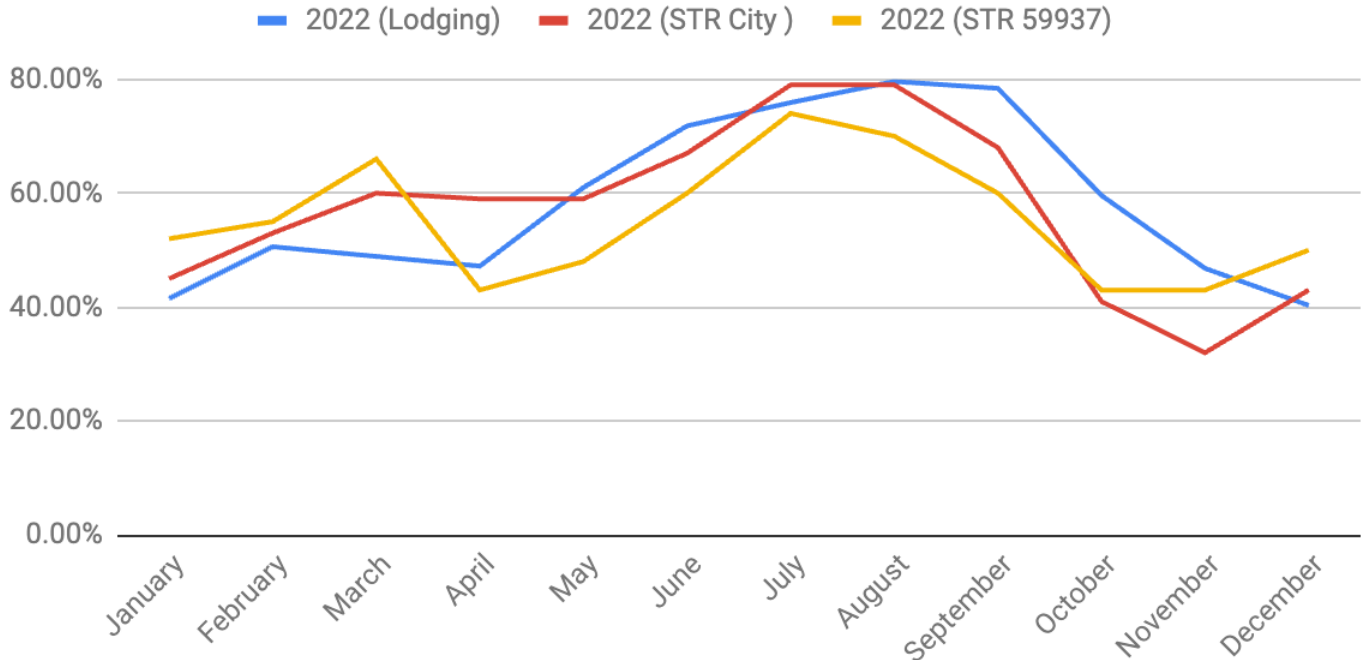
- January - March: 52.6 % (+17%)
- April - June: 61.7% (+26%)
- July - September: 75.3% (+15%)
- October - December: 38.7% (-1%)
- Calendar Year 2022 Average Lodging Occupancy: 57.1% (+15%)

WHITEFISH SHORT TERM RENTAL ZIP CODE (59937) AVERAGE LODGING OCCUPANCY BY QUARTER: 2021 VS 2019

Source: Source: AirDNA, Calendar Year 2022 Compared to 2021

- January - March: 57.7% (+7%)
- April - June: 50% (+5%)
- July - September: 68% (-4%)
- October - December: 45% (+4%)
- Calendar Year 2022 Average Lodging Occupancy: 55.3% (+2%)

Whitefish Lodging Occupancy: 2022 Comparison



Data: Smith Travel Research, Air DNA, Graph and Averages Calculated by Whitefish CVB

DOMESTIC NONRESIDENT WHITEFISH EXPENDITURES BY MARKET

The identified geographic markets for Explore Whitefish are informed by domestic nonresident expenditures acquired through a research cooperative with Brand Montana and VisaVue. Below you will find yearly and quarterly numbers for the past year.

WHITEFISH 2022 VISA CARD VISITOR EXPENDITURES BY MSA: \$65.5 Million

Source: VisaVue and other sources, Expenditures include Montana residents who reside outside of Flathead County

2022 QUARTER 1 (JANUARY - MARCH) BY MSA: \$12.4 Million

- 6.4% Seattle
- 3.9% Missoula, MT
- 3.1% Portland, OR
- 2.7% Minneapolis
- 2.5% Los Angeles

2022 QUARTER 2 (APRIL - JUNE) BY MSA: \$13.4 Million

- 4.8% Seattle
- 3.7% Los Angeles
- 3.3% Missoula, MT
- 2.6% Dallas
- 2.5% Phoenix

2022 QUARTER 3 (JULY - SEPTEMBER) BY MSA: \$28.3 Million

- 5.1% Seattle
- 4.0% Los Angeles
- 3.5% Dallas
- 2.6% Phoenix
- 2.6% San Francisco

2022 QUARTER 4 (OCTOBER - DECEMBER) BY MSA: \$10.1 Million

- 6.7% Seattle
- 5.1% Missoula, MT
- 4.0% Los Angeles
- 2.7% Bozeman
- 2.3% San Diego

NONRESIDENT TRAVELER EXPENDITURE BY AIR

Not all visitors are alike. The same is true of their economic impact. Research by ITRR indicates that nonresidents who travel to the state via air spend more money per day and stay longer than the average nonresident traveler group.

- **Average Nonresident Travelers:** The statewide average 2021 nonresident traveler group to Montana (2.33 people) spent an average of \$177.46 per day. With an average length of stay of 5.2 nights, this equates to a total trip expenditure of approximately \$923.
- **Fly-in Nonresident Travelers:** The statewide average 2021 fly-in nonresident traveler group arriving in Montana (2.45 people) spent an average of \$270.11 per day. With an average length of stay of 7.25 nights, this equates to a total trip expenditure of approximately \$1,958.
- **Difference:** \$1,035 in additional spending per fly-in statewide nonresident travel group. In addition, all 2021 nonresident traveler groups arriving at Glacier Park International Airport (2.46 people) stayed longer (7.57 nights) and outspent average statewide nonresident travelers by an estimated \$1,008 per trip (total trip expenditure of \$1,931).

4.6 CONSUMER ADVERTISING: PAID MEDIA

STRATEGY FOR CONSUMER ADVERTISING: PAID MEDIA

Our consumer advertising is based around visitation in our shoulder seasons and our strategy is broken out into the following three categories: Larch Season, Winter, and Secret Season. The consumer advertising budget for each strategy is allocated to the seasonal media buying plan. Opportunity Marketing funds are left open as a contingency for reactive media buys throughout the season.

We advertise in our stated target markets as well as through cooperative opportunities with Brand Montana and multi-channel cooperative marketing campaigns with Whitefish Mountain Resort (WMR).

In FY24, online and digital advertising will continue to comprise 100% of our consumer advertising budget. The enhanced ability to track the effectiveness of our advertising campaigns to inspire actionable visits to ExploreWhitefish.com is the foundation for media buying strategy.

During FY24, our media buying strategy will be broken out into digital placement, media partnerships, and video/audio streaming services. Examples of each type of placement can be found below:

Digital placement: Google Search, Explore Whitefish video and custom website content featured on our owned paid channels such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as programmatic display and native placements, and Google Discovery display and video

Media partnerships: Custom video, editorial, and email newsletters with Whitefish Mountain Resort, 1889/1859 Magazines, Protect Our Winters, and Outside Media

Video/audio streaming services: Spotify

Destination Analysts recently asked respondents which marketing channels they were most receptive to learning about new destinations to visit. Many of the channels utilized in the FY24 Explore Whitefish online/digital media strategy ranked in the top ten. This includes:

- Websites found via search engine (#1: 30.0%)
- Facebook (#2: 24.1%)
- Online content such as articles and blogs (#3: 22.6%)
- Streaming video services such as YouTube, Hulu, etc. (#5: 19.7%)
- Email (#6: 16.8%)
- Instagram (#7: 16.4%)

(The State of the American Traveler: Destinations Edition: January 2023)

Explore Whitefish continues to utilize local and regional data as success indicators for the activities of Explore Whitefish as well as the foundation for our marketing strategies based upon historic and current seasonal trends in our local economy.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Resort Tax Collections (monthly, quarterly, yearly)
- Lodging Tax Collections (quarterly, yearly)
- Lodging Occupancy Report (monthly, quarterly, yearly)
- Nonresident Visitor Expenditures (monthly, quarterly, yearly)
- Glacier National Park Recreational Visits (monthly)
- Whitefish Mountain Resort Visits (ski season)

Explore Whitefish has recently adopted a customer-intent based strategy in order to monitor success indicators happening on the Explore Whitefish website. Rather than using upper-funnel signals like website visits to measure success, Explore Whitefish will now leverage bottom of the funnel signals of customer-intent to track indicators of success on the website such as clicks to book. Actions such as these are a better indicator that a website visitor is coming, or is strongly considering coming, to Whitefish than someone simply landing on the Explore Whitefish homepage. As we collect more of this data, season over season and year over year growth will be tracked, and our goal is to grow the volume of these high intent consumer actions over time. Specifically, we will be tracking and growing the following success measures.

Destination Marketing: Paid Media

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
<p>Improve winter visitation by showcasing varied winter vacation experiences in and around Whitefish and Glacier National Park.</p> <p>Improve “Secret Season” visitation by promoting bicycling, wildlife viewing, birding, fly fishing, golf, water sports, horseback riding, performing arts, culinary experiences, and community events.</p> <p>Improve “Larch Season” visitation by promoting fall foliage, wildlife viewing, hiking, birding, golf, fly fishing, bicycling,</p>	<p>Successful execution of winter season, secret season, and larch season seasonal campaigns. Success measures are compared to the performance from past seasonal campaigns, including FY23.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ad click through rates/Ad cost per click • View and impressions for video and streaming ads <p>Website success measurements are compared to website performance from past seasonal campaigns, including FY23.</p>

non-motorized water sports, horseback riding, performing arts, culinary experiences, and community events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clicks to book • Clicks to reserve (restaurant) • Newsletter sign-ups • Travel guide digital views • Traffic volume from targeted markets • Visitor quality measures (Bounce rate, Length of time spent on site, number of pages viewed)
Develop a DAM for managing photo library	Add 30 photos per quarter with keywords
Acquire compelling photos for use in paid media campaigns, visitor information, social media channels and the website.	Acquire 10 professional photos with usage rights for the fiscal year.
Leverage media partnerships for upcoming media campaigns.	Participate in at least one media partnership for FY24.
Examine and act upon new marketing opportunities which present themselves which are in line with the Explore Whitefish Marketing Strategy.	Depending on the opportunity, we measure success in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to, the objective measurements outlined in the FY24 Annual Plan.

A. Larch Season: Occupancy history in Whitefish shows that during the period of late June through August the town is at its busiest. From late August into early September, occupancy levels are still strong, but begin to wane. The objective is to grow occupancy and business levels in the autumn for the time period of late September to the end of October. The approach for this time period is to develop and communicate narratives for adventures, activities, fall events, and specific reasons for visiting Whitefish during this time period that cannot be experienced if Whitefish were visited during another time of year. As we continue to position Whitefish as the basecamp of Glacier National Park, the narrative will lead with fall experiences in Glacier National Park such as scenic driving, fall foliage, wildlife watching, and hiking. Explore Whitefish has allocated 20% of its overall consumer advertising budgets to Larch Season marketing efforts.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The target audience for this time period are those who fit the Explore Whitefish preferred traveler profile, are 40 and older with a household income (HHI) over \$75,000 – \$150,000+, whose travel or vacation is not restricted by an academic calendar, and who have an education level of Bachelors' degree or higher.

PSYCHOGRAPHICS

Travelers seeking active experiences such as scenic driving, wildlife viewing, hiking, birding, golf, fly-fishing, road and mountain biking, non-motorized water sports, horseback riding, paddling, and hiking. Cultural and culinary experiences such as dining, shopping at local shops, attending performing arts, and community events are also considered primary autumn activities for Whitefish. This includes traveling to Whitefish primarily for the purpose of relaxing, strolling the streets and shops and trying out great dining and nightlife options.

B. Winter: Whitefish offers a world-class ski and snowboarding experience, including unique winter events, yet destination visitation to the town is still significantly lower than the summer season. As a result, Explore Whitefish has allocated 60% of its overall consumer advertising budget to winter ski marketing efforts. These efforts also seek to focus on the winter experiences in Glacier National Park, including sightseeing, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. The perception that Glacier National Park is closed in the winter continues to be a challenge and our increased efforts to showcase these winter experiences will hopefully help to dispel this myth. In addition, Whitefish also has fat bike and cross-country skiing experiences near town.

DEMOGRAPHICS

For the 2020/2021 season, the National Ski Areas Association (NSAA) estimated that there were 10.5 million domestic active skiers or snowboarders who account for roughly 3.2% of the total U.S. population (NSAA 2021 U.S. Snowsports Participants Report). Our target audience for this time period are those who meet the Explore Whitefish preferred traveler profile, are 35 and older with a household income (HHI) over \$100,000, and whose travel or vacation is not restricted by an academic calendar. Since we are targeting a small percentage of the domestic population, and particularly those active participants, we can most efficiently reach this target through niche channels.

PSYCHOGRAPHICS

We largely apply our overall preferred traveler profile to the ski market. Experiential preferences for authentic travel are more likely to appreciate and enjoy Whitefish and then return again in subsequent years. The top reasons for choosing Whitefish for a winter destination were cited as “experience of a prior winter visit” and “affordability compared to other resorts” and “snow conditions” and “lack of crowding” and “the Town of Whitefish” (Whitefish Mountain Resort 2018/19 End of Season Report). It is important that we acquire new, repeat customers, not simply attract one-time visitors who are not a good fit for the Whitefish experience and as a result will not likely return. The addition of marketing the aforementioned Glacier National Park winter experiences provide additional breathtaking experiences for a day off for skiers and snowboarders as well as those who do not alpine ski or snowboard.

C. Secret Season: The objective is to begin the visitor season earlier and grow occupancy and business levels in the spring and early summer for the time period of May and June. The approach for this time period is to develop and communicate narratives for adventures, activities and specific reasons for visiting Whitefish during these time periods that cannot be experienced if Whitefish were visited during another time of year. As we continue to position Whitefish as the basecamp of Glacier National Park, the narrative will lead with spring experiences in Glacier National Park such as biking or hiking the Going-To-The-Sun Road and wildlife watching. Explore Whitefish has allocated 20% of its overall consumer advertising budgets to spring marketing efforts.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The target audience for this time period are those who fit the Explore Whitefish preferred traveler profile, are 40 and older with a household income (HHI) over \$75,000 – \$150,000+, whose travel or vacation is not restricted by an academic calendar, and who have an education level of Bachelors’ degree or higher.

PSYCHOGRAPHICS

Travelers seeking active experiences such as road and mountain biking, wildlife viewing, hiking, birding, golf, non-motorized water sports, and horseback riding. Cultural and culinary experiences such as dining, shopping at local shops, attending performing arts, and community events are also considered primary spring activities for Whitefish. This includes traveling to Whitefish primarily for the purpose of relaxing, strolling the streets and shops and trying out great dining and nightlife options.

D. Secret Season and Larch Season Core Activity - Cycling: In both the Secret Season and Larch Season, cycling is a strong visitor activity. We have identified road biking the Going-to-the-Sun Road before it opens to cars in the spring as our seminal Secret Season experience and has been the lead in our Secret Season advertising campaigns for the past three years. The development of miles of mountain biking in the Whitefish area has also created a new tourism draw in recent years. Whitefish is also located on three Adventure Cycling routes, creating a favorite stopping point for cyclists on long-distance tours.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Touring cyclists have a median age of 53 and over 50% have an income of \$75,000-\$150,000. Mountain bikers are typically 25-45 years old and the majority are male with a household income level greater than \$80,000. The target audience are cyclists who fit the Explore Whitefish preferred traveler profile.

Source: ITRR Adventure Cycling Study

PSYCHOGRAPHICS

Travelers are spending days cycling, and want to spend time off the bike eating good food, drinking local beer, and

experiencing local nightlife.
Source: ITRR Adventure Cycling Study

4.7 SOCIAL MEDIA

Strategy For Social Media: As our overall marketing strategy continues to incorporate a higher emphasis on destination stewardship and recreate responsibly messaging, so too has our social media strategy. Social media continues to be a powerful tool for telling the Whitefish story and to support and complement other marketing strategies. Social media helps build brand support, raise awareness and allows current and potential visitors to connect with Explore Whitefish through various channels.

In addition to our established social media goals of engaging potential visitors and keeping Whitefish top-of-mind, the social media program has become a valuable tool for messaging local and statewide health guidelines, crisis communication and educational information for visitors and local residents. These include the aforementioned “Recreate Responsibly” messaging, Friend of the Fish information, “Leave No Trace” guidelines, wildfire messaging, providing information about local businesses to visitors, and informative posts aligning with the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan.

Social media has also become a primary advertising tool for Explore Whitefish in its seasonal advertising plans. Social media allows ads to be targeted to audiences that align with our established geographic and demographic audiences.

Social media channels are constantly evolving and Explore Whitefish has identified Facebook and Instagram as the primary channels to focus its efforts on while also using Youtube to support these efforts.

As reflected in the Explore Whitefish Social Media Guidelines, the Explore Whitefish goals for social media include:

- Provide information to current and potential visitors regarding safety, responsible visitation and best practices.
- Interact with audience to answer questions and facilitate communication and connections
- Raise awareness and inspire travelers to visit Whitefish during winter and shoulder seasons
- Expand the reach and interactions with our social media audience

See the Appendix for more information on the Explore Whitefish Social Media Channels.

AUDIENCE

The target audience for social media efforts mirrors that of the Explore Whitefish preferred traveler and also includes on-the-ground visitors and local residents for the Friend of The Fish warm season education campaign.

- High potential visitors and geotravelers in core geographic markets (Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Regional Drive-To)
- Established geographic markets (Calgary, Missoula, Spokane, CDA)
- On-the-ground visitors during the warm season (May 1 - September 30)

Having an audience that actively engages and interacts with Explore Whitefish through social media channels is equally as important as total audience size. Social media success will primarily be measured by audience engagement.

Destination Marketing & Stewardship: Social Media

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Integrate destination stewardship messaging into social media messaging	Weekly Social Media Posts

Spotlight one local member business per week on our social media channels	Weekly Social Media Posts
Increase combined Facebook and Instagram engagements (likes, comments, clicks) by 10% over FY23 total	Use Sprout Social to measure engagement versus previous fiscal year

4.8 GROUPS MARKETING

STRATEGY FOR GROUP MARKETING

The meeting and convention industry has shifted dramatically since the pandemic. As businesses have largely resumed in-person meeting and convention business, Whitefish is starting to see the return of larger groups to our region. As the industry continues to evolve, Explore Whitefish is working to best assist member properties in securing future group business in Whitefish.

Meeting and convention business has traditionally helped to support our member lodging properties through the non-peak visitation periods of fall, winter and spring. Many properties have availability to accommodate larger groups for lodging, meeting venue space and food and beverage offerings. The town of Whitefish offers additional benefits through a variety of excellent dining options, boutique shopping, art galleries, nightlife, and high quality performing arts venues and companies. Combined, this makes Whitefish a desirable location for a variety of meeting and convention groups.

Explore Whitefish also partners with Glacier Country Regional Tourism on FAM trips and groups marketing efforts.

GROUP TRAVEL DEMOGRAPHICS

The target audience for group travel is categorized into two basic groups: SMERF (Social, Military, Educational, Religious, Fraternal) and MICE (Meetings, Incentive, Conferencing, Exhibitions). Both audiences desire a scenic location with availability of activities for recreation and team building. The majority of groups that visit the Whitefish area are in the 25-150 person range, although Whitefish can accommodate citywide groups up to 250 participants and has submitted multi-property proposals for groups of 400+.

SKI GROUP TRAVEL DEMOGRAPHICS

The winter season ski product is a strong offering that has potential for growth. Participating properties and Whitefish Mountain Resort are cooperatively marketing winter ski trips to groups of skiers from across the country. Ski clubs contribute significant revenue in the number of rooms booked and lift tickets purchased. While access to the area represents one of the biggest challenges for getting ski groups here, increases in number of flights, size of aircrafts utilized and destinations serviced by Glacier Park International Airport (FCA) have continuously improved accessibility every year. Whitefish Mountain Resort ski group business has shown historical increases year to year.

Whitefish Mountain Resort has a good indication of the volume of ski groups visiting annually from their own lodging as well as from group tickets ordered by groups staying in other properties. In addition, multiple Explore Whitefish member properties attend spring ski shows

GEOGRAPHIC AUDIENCE

Aligning with Brand Montana, target areas include Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis and Chicago. Additional areas of focus include Alberta (including but not limited to Calgary and Edmonton) and in-state and regional drive markets (including Missoula, Spokane, Great Falls and Helena).

Destination Marketing: Groups Marketing

OBJECTIVES	Measurable Metric for Success
Encourage ski groups and incentive travel with emphasis on Fall, Winter and Spring.	Award Group Incentive Sponsorships to business members in Whitefish to help entice group visitation.
Participate in at least one industry event/trade show.	Virtual or in-person attendance
Participate in at least two FAM trips	Virtual or in-person attendance

Support WCVB Groups Committee representatives at spring ski shows	Funds successfully distributed for spring ski show travel support
Respond to requests for city-wide meetings and conventions which fit the capacity of Whitefish	Submission of city-wide RFPs as needed working with WCVB Groups Committee

5 BUDGET OVERVIEW

5.1 PROVIDE A BUDGET AMOUNT FOR ADMINISTRATION, EACH MARKETING SEGMENT, AND EACH SEGMENT'S METHOD WHEN PROVIDING OVERALL BUDGET

Explore Whitefish begins our budget process for the upcoming fiscal year during early January with initial approval by the Board of Directors in March. We have utilized projections from Brand Montana, advanced lodging booking data, national travel data from Destination Analysts, and other sources as baselines to create the following budget projection. As we monitor collections closely, we may need to adjust these projections.

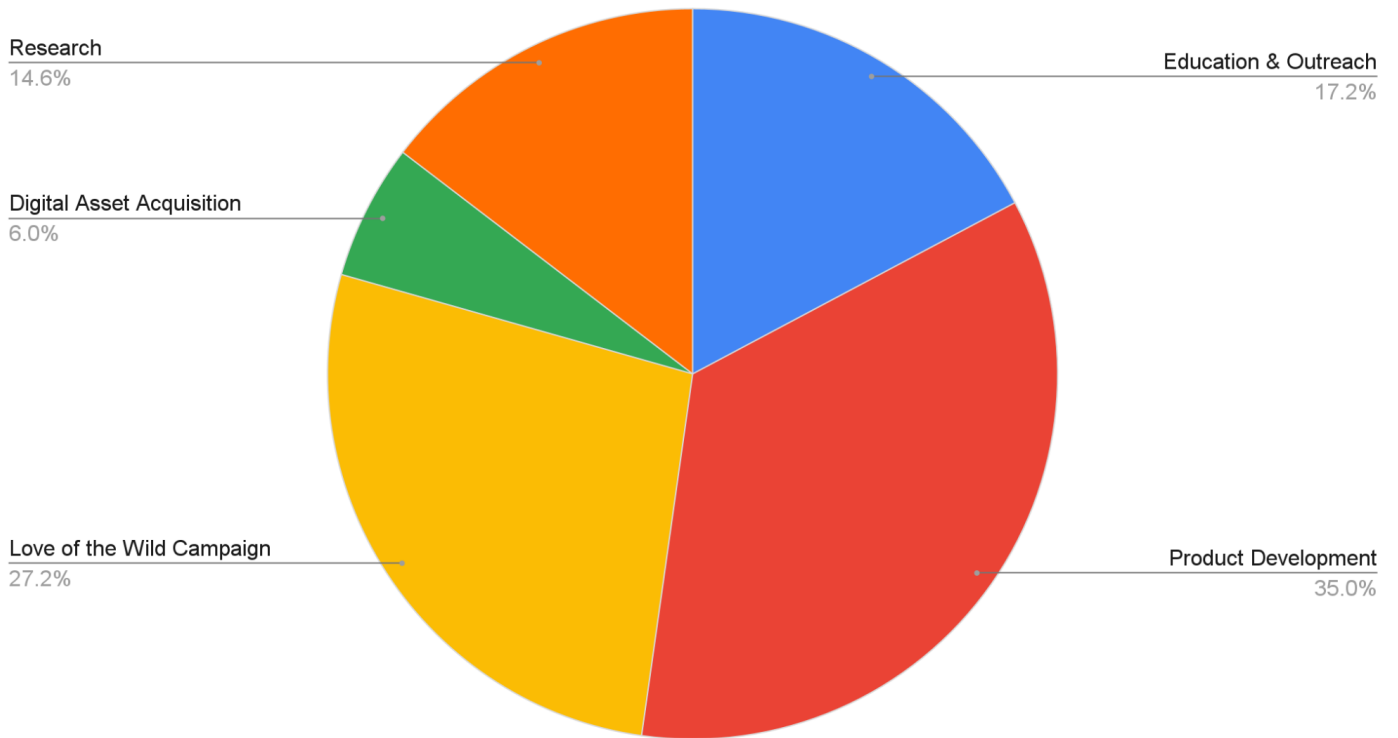
Explore Whitefish works closely with our board of directors and finance committee to evaluate collections and expenditures on a monthly basis. If Bed Tax revenues do not meet projected collections, the following budget line items from the FY24 Public Budget will be adjusted.

- Paid Media

FY24 PUBLIC BED TAX BUDGET <i>Approved Budget Projection as of 03/13/2023</i>	PUBLIC BED TAX BUDGET
CONSUMER	\$82,700
PAID MEDIA**	\$82,700
Shoulder Season Campaigns (Love of The Wild)	\$66,700
Digital Asset Acquisition and Management	\$16,000
PUBLIC RELATIONS	
GROUP MARKETING	
MARKETING SUPPORT	\$184,300
ADMINISTRATION	\$50
OPPORTUNITY MARKETING	\$5,800
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT	\$93,450
RESEARCH	\$39,000
TAC & GOVERNOR'S CONFERENCE MEETINGS	\$2,500
EDUCATION & OUTREACH	\$43,500
BUDGET TOTALS	\$267,000

*** Budget line items to be adjusted if revenues do not meet projected collections*

FY24 Bed Tax Budget - \$267,000



***Education & Outreach budget includes public/private partnerships, Explore Whitefish Grant Program, etc.*

APPENDIX: WHITEFISH NONRESIDENT VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS (FOUR YEAR AVERAGE OF 2019-2022)

NON-RESIDENT WHITEFISH VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS

Source: 2022 ITRR Non-Resident Visitor Study

- 93% visited Glacier National Park
- 65% traveled as a pair (2 persons)
- Average group size was 2.99
- 82% have HHI (Household Income) above \$75,000
- 44% Male, 56% Female
- 13% were first time visitors
- Average age of visitor was 60 years old
- Average length of stay in Montana was 7.0 nights

NON-RESIDENT WHITEFISH VISITOR AGE GROUPS REPRESENTED

Source: 2022 ITRR Non-Resident Visitor Study. The total response percentage exceeds 100% because the question allowed for multiple choices thus the total number of answer choices selected were greater than the number of respondents

- 14% Under 18 years old
- 10% 18-24 years old
- 6% 25-34 years old
- 8% 35-44 years old
- 21% 45-54 years old
- 56% 55-64 years old
- 46% 65-74 years old
- 11% 75 and older

TOP FIVE NON-RESIDENT VISITORS TO WHITEFISH ACTIVITIES WHILE IN MONTANA

Source: 2022 ITRR Non-Resident Visitor Study

- 63% Day hiking
- 56% Scenic Driving
- 53% Wildlife watching
- 34% Visit local brewery
- 34% Nature photography

WHERE NON-RESIDENT VISITORS TO WHITEFISH PRIMARILY COME FROM

Source: 2019-2022 ITRR Non-Resident Visitor Study

- 11% Washington
- 7% Texas
- 6% Alberta, Colorado, Minnesota, California
- 4% Oregon, Arizona, Wisconsin, Florida
- 3% New York, Idaho, Ohio, North Dakota, British Columbia, Utah, Missouri

APPENDIX: EXPLORE WHITEFISH TRAVEL PLANNING FUNNEL

Explore Whitefish successfully integrates communication throughout the travel planning funnel:

INSPIRATION > ORIENTATION > FACILITATION

Inspiration. At the highest levels of communication, Explore Whitefish leverages the Montana branding guidelines in its selection of imagery and video and development of creative marketing content, while applying its own Whitefish spin on things. We want to foster an emotional connection with this combination of imagery, video, and creative content so that the viewer will move forward with the primary call, which is to visit ExploreWhitefish.com.

Tools:

- ExploreWhitefish.com
- Explore Whitefish Social Media Channels (Facebook and Instagram)
- Earned media features
- Targeted content and search marketing
- Sponsored content in targeting and retargeting campaigns
- Seasonal content in consumer newsletters
- Partner websites such as: glaciermt.com, visitmt.com, and skiwhitefish.com

Orientation. Orientation to new opportunities is administered through interactive maps within the Explore Whitefish website, as well as companion maps within the Travel Guide and a printed town map available for visitors at kiosks and visitor centers. All maps have a consistent look between them. Depending on the method of communication, the location of Whitefish within the state, or its proximity to other points of interest in the region is detailed.

Tools:

- ExploreWhitefish.com and interactive map
- Seasonal itineraries and activity specific content created for ExploreWhitefish.com and used for paid advertising, social media, and consumer newsletters
- Event calendar at ExploreWhitefish.com/events
- Whitefish Town Map and Whitefish Travel Guide

Facilitation. Facilitation (connecting users with stakeholder businesses) is achieved by empowering individual businesses with the capacity to create and maintain business information, specials, packages, video and events that are displayed at ExploreWhitefish.com. The travel guide and locator maps are made available at local visitor information kiosks, visitor information centers and business locations throughout the town.

Tools:

- Self service visitor information kiosks with free wifi
- Seasonal itineraries and activity specific content with business links on ExploreWhitefish.com
- “Book Now” buttons for lodging reservations on ExploreWhitefish.com
- “Reserve Now” buttons for restaurants and activities on ExploreWhitefish.com
- Whitefish Town Map and Whitefish Travel Guide
- Year-round walk-in Visitor Information Center

APPENDIX: Whitefish Winter Traveler Profile

OVERVIEW OF SNOWSPORTS VISITS 2021/2022 SEASON

Source: NSAA, ITRR, WMR, 2021/22 ski season.

- 61 Million: Nationwide (record setting year; +3.5% YOY increase)
- 1.2 Million: Montana (+18%)
- 463,875: Whitefish Mountain Resort (+1.2%)

WHITEFISH MOUNTAIN RESORT OVERNIGHT VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS

Source: 2022-23 Whitefish Mountain Resort RRC Report (YTD)

- 81% have HHI (Household Income) above \$75,000
- 41% were first time overnight visitors
- 55% were overnight visitors
- Average age was 44.3 years old
- 54% of overnight visitors used air travel
- Average number of nights on trip: 5.8
- Average number of days skied/snowboarded 4.1 days
- 52% stayed at accommodations in town while 33% stayed at the mountain

WHITEFISH MOUNTAIN RESORT OVERNIGHT VISITOR AGE GROUPS REPRESENTED

Source: 2022-23 Whitefish Mountain Resort RRC Report (YTD)

- 2% Under 18 years old
- 6% 18-24 years old
- 18% 25-34 years old
- 28% 35-44 years old
- 22% 45-54 years old
- 12% 55-64 years old
- 10% 65-74 years old
- 2% 75 and older

WHITEFISH MOUNTAIN RESORT LOCATION OF ORIGIN OF VISITORS

Source: 2022-23 Whitefish Mountain Resort RRC Report (YTD)

- 45% Montana (47% in 21/22)
- 6% Canada (3% in 21/22)
- 5% Washington (7% in 21/22)
- 4% California (2% in 21/22)
- 4% Minnesota (3% in 21/22)
- 3% Florida (4% in 21/22)

APPENDIX: Montana Non-Resident Cycling Traveler Profile

A study performed by ITRR and Adventure Cycling found that bicycle travelers spend an average of \$75-\$102 per person per day, and time spent in Montana tends to be eight days or longer. This equates to an estimated \$180 additionally spent by a bicycle traveler over the average non-resident traveler in an eight day period. Mountain bike tourism has seen significant increase and economic impact as well. Between the cross-country style of The Whitefish Trail and the downhill lift accessed trails at Whitefish Mountain Resort, serious investment has been made by the community and member businesses to appeal to local riders and visitors alike. Destination Analysts activity-based segmentation by expected spending in Montana reveals that travelers interested in biking (mountain biking, road biking, etc.) have the potential to average over \$2,000 per trip in total spending.

NON-RESIDENT BICYCLING ACTIVITIES WHILE IN MONTANA

Source: 2020 ITRR Non-Resident Visitor Study

- 7% Bicycling
- 5% Mountain Biking
- 2% Road/Touring Bicycling

A 2018 study conducted by Headwaters Economics in partnership with Whitefish Legacy Partners and Explore Whitefish found that The Whitefish Trail contributes to \$6.4 million in annual spending by visitors who come to enjoy the trail and by locals who purchase or rent outdoor gear at local stores. Spending by visitors who use the Whitefish Trail translates to 68 additional jobs and \$1.9 million in labor income in Whitefish. Visitors whose primary purpose is outdoor recreation have significantly greater daily and overall spending than those who are not in Whitefish for outdoor recreation and they tend to stay in the area longer, further increasing their economic impact.

AVERAGE DAILY SPEND DURING VISIT TO WHITEFISH

Source: 2018 Headwaters Economic Study

- Non-Recreation Visitors: \$227
- Recreation Visitors: \$278

AVERAGE LENGTH OF VISIT TO WHITEFISH

Source: 2018 Headwaters Economic Study

- Non-Recreation Visitors: 4.2 nights
- Recreation Visitors: 5.8 nights

AVERAGE TOTAL TRIP SPENDING

Source: 2018 Headwaters Economic Study

- Non-Recreation Visitors: \$1,323
- Recreation Visitors: \$1,991

During the spring and summer of 2015, ITRR conducted an additional bicycle study in Glacier National Park. Summer bicyclists included a significant representation of non-residents and the information below pertains to summer bicyclists only.

TOP 5 AREAS WHERE GLACIER NATIONAL PARK VISITORS BICYCLED DURING THEIR TRIP IN MONTANA

Source: 2016 ITRR Non-Glacier NP Bicycle Study. The total response percentage exceeds 100% because the question allowed for multiple choices thus the total number of answer choices selected were greater than the number of respondents

- 61% Within Glacier National Park
- 44% West Glacier
- 35% Other Areas Of Montana
- 34% Whitefish
- 25% St. Mary

RESPONDENT BICYCLE BEHAVIOR IN MONTANA

Source: 2016 ITRR Non-Glacier NP Bicycle Study. The total response percentage exceeds 100% because the question allowed for multiple choices thus the total number of answer choices selected were greater than the number of respondents

- 84% Brought a bike
- 22% Bicycled into Montana
- 14% Rented a bicycle
- 11% Took an organized bicycle tour

APPENDIX: Explore Whitefish Social Media Platforms

Why use social media? A study published by Convince & Convert found that 53% of Americans who follow brands in social media are more loyal to those brands. By engaging our audience through social media, it allows us to craft relationships with customers before, during, and after they have visited Whitefish.

- Most social media users log into their accounts at least once per day, according to Pew Research Center, and many people are checking social media multiple times per day. An active social media program keeps Whitefish top-of-mind as vacation plans are being made throughout the year.
 - 71% of consumers who have had a good social media service experience with a brand are likely to recommend it to others. (Source: Ambassador)
 - Explore Whitefish will continue to rely on its beautiful surroundings to help promote the area to potential visitors. According to Hubspot, visual content is more than 40 times more likely to get shared on social media than other types of content.
 - The Explore Whitefish social media channels continued to experience high engagement and growth in FY23. Instagram remained the largest audience with 56,928 followers although Facebook surpassed Instagram in total impressions (8,443,051) and total engagements (264,040). (*time period: 3/1/22-2/28/23*)
 - With the growth of our social media audience, impressions and engagements, we have an opportunity to educate a growing audience on destination stewardship messaging including, but not limited to, Recreate Responsibly, Leave No Trace, and Friend of The Fish.
- **Audience observations for a 1-year time period: 3/1/22 - 2/28/23**
 - Instagram:
 - 56,928 followers (+6.5% YOY)
 - 4,545,014 total impressions (-29.7% YOY)
 - 191,041 total engagements (-26.3% YOY)
 - Facebook:
 - 32,636 fans (+6.8% YOY)
 - 8,443,051 total impressions (-18.2% YOY)
 - 264,040 total engagements (-12.7% YOY)

APPENDIX: EXPLORE WHITEFISH PUBLIC RELATIONS: COMMUNICATIONS & SUSTAINABILITY

Given today's complex ecosystem of media, consumers are hard-pressed to discern credible media sources. A Nielsen study commissioned by *inPowered* on the role of content in the consumer decision-making process concluded that earned media is almost 90% more effective than advertising. The study found that, "On average, expert content lifted familiarity 88 percent more than branded content."

Another study published by the *Journal of Promotional Management* found that its 1,500 participants were most likely to find an earned media story as the most credible news source compared to a newspaper advertisement, a native advertisement, a blog written by an independent source, or a blog written by a company. Participants indicated that strong writing, numerous facts, and a balanced perspective lead them to trust a news story.

Earned media compliments and reinforces advertising and vice versa. While paid advertising provides the opportunity to inspire and tell the consumer what sets our destination apart from the competition, earned content lets others sing our praises and ultimately adds more credibility to our brand. This implied third-party endorsement not only impacts credibility among potential visitors, but offers a significant return on investment. For example, a one-page ad in *Travel + Leisure* magazine costs [\\$215,900](#) (not including creative). While acknowledging that earned media and paid advertising support one another — and neither is as effective alone without the other — earned media is strategically leveraged within media platforms where Explore Whitefish has advertisement placements.

While the value of earned media remains high, the long-standing public relations program has shifted to focus on communications and sustainability, with all earned media strategy focused on destination stewardship. By communicating the story of Whitefish through the lens of sustainable visitation, adhering to our updated mission and vision, and carefully selecting media *only* dedicated to telling our story in the sustainable tourism light, the Whitefish brand will continue to attract geo-travelers and support more balanced visitation annually.

Explore Whitefish does not promote or host media for summer-focused stories. We ask them to always consider their part in our sustainable tourism efforts and pitch them on fall, winter, and spring story angles. Media pitches include topics such as recreating responsibly, leave no trace, respecting public and private lands, recycling, aquatic invasive species (AIS) education, wildfire mitigation, water quality best practices, reducing wildlife conflicts, supporting local businesses, and all "Be a Friend of the Fish" messaging.

Photography and written content are produced for social channels, the website, and other marketing materials to support marketing campaigns, publicity, and promotions. News releases are distributed to target media for editorial placement or as a catalyst for feature story placement.

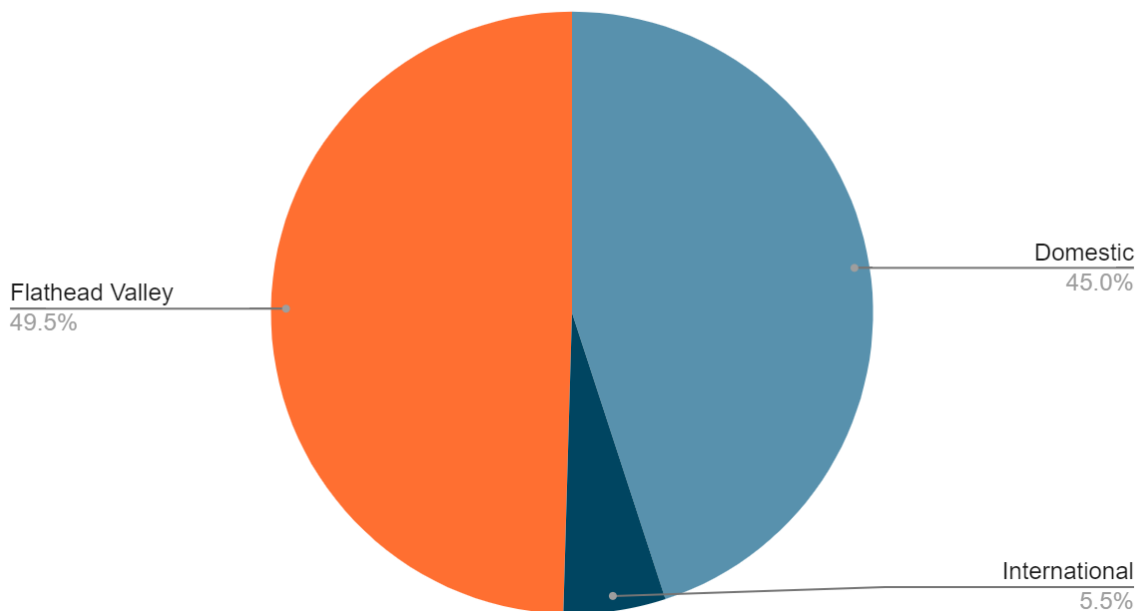
Strategic partnerships with the Montana Office of Tourism & Business Development, Glacier Country Tourism, and Whitefish Mountain Resort help further leverage media and communications efforts. Other partnerships include the City of Whitefish, the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce, the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan committee, Whitefish Legacy Partners, Whitefish Lake Institute, Climate Action Standing Committee, Climate Smart Glacier Country, Housing Whitefish, and the Whitefish Chamber of Commerce.

Explore Whitefish also works collaboratively with the City of Whitefish to create and effectively implement crisis communication strategies between industry partners and externally to media outlets and stakeholders related to environmental, social, and economic factors which affect travel to Whitefish and visitors on the ground.

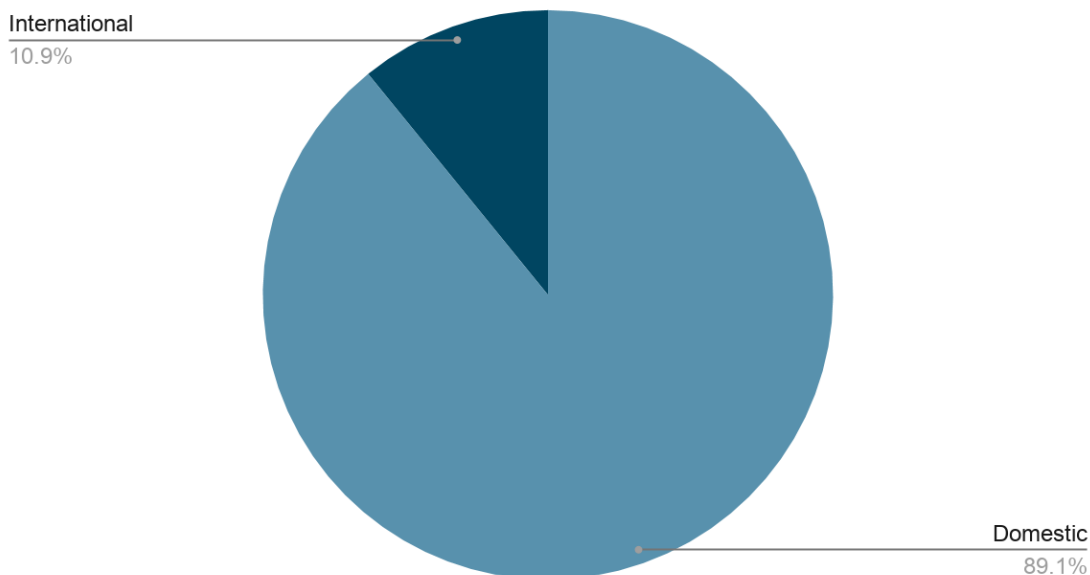
APPENDIX: WHITEFISH HISTORICAL VISA CARD SPENDING COMPARISON: NONRESIDENT VS RESIDENTS VS INTERNATIONAL

Source: VisaVue and other sources. Nonresidents include Montana residents who reside outside of Flathead County. Residents include Montana residents who reside inside Flathead County. International visitors include those who reside outside of the United States

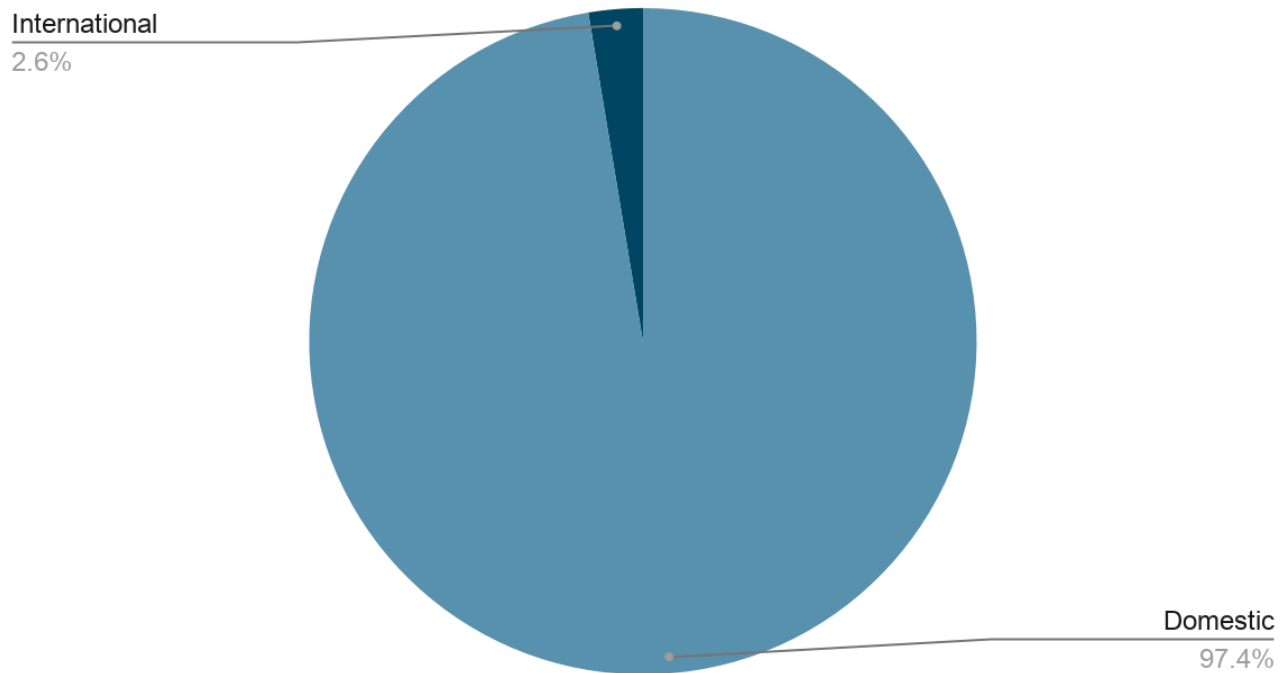
2019 Whitefish Nonresident Expenditures (All): \$141.2M



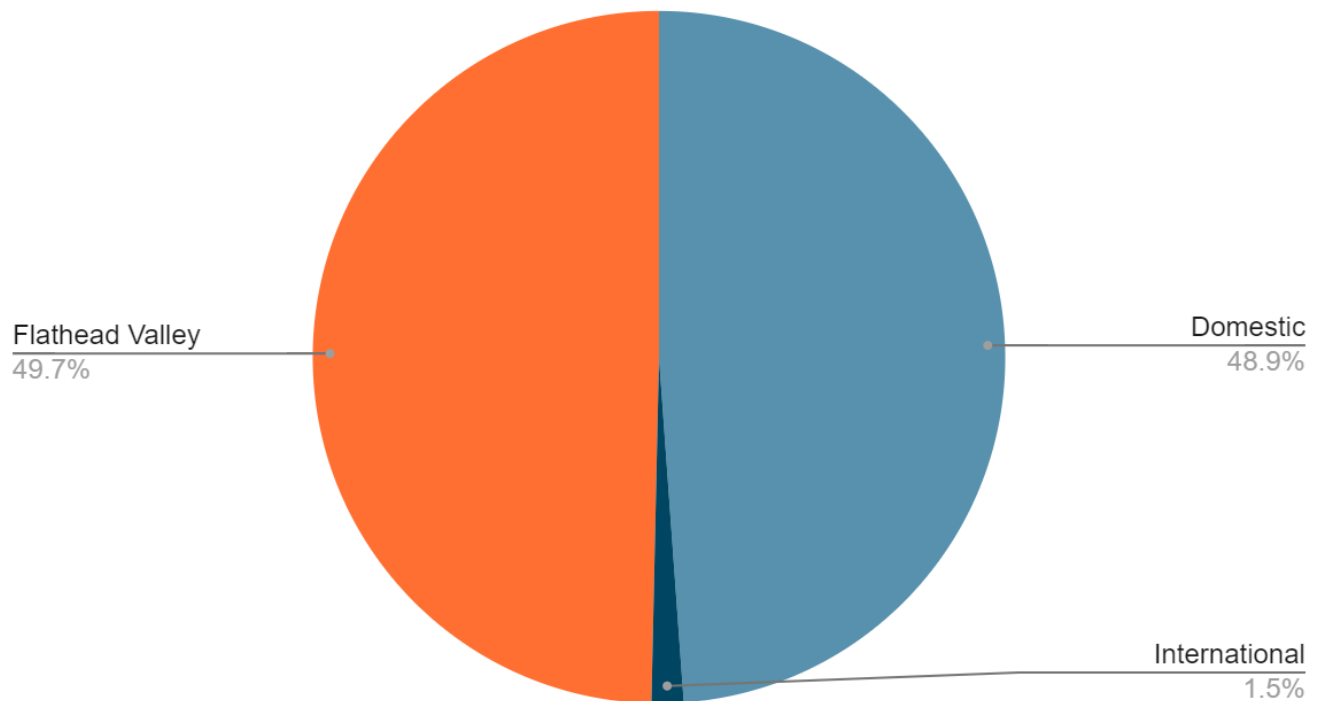
2019 Whitefish Visitor Expenditures: \$71.2M



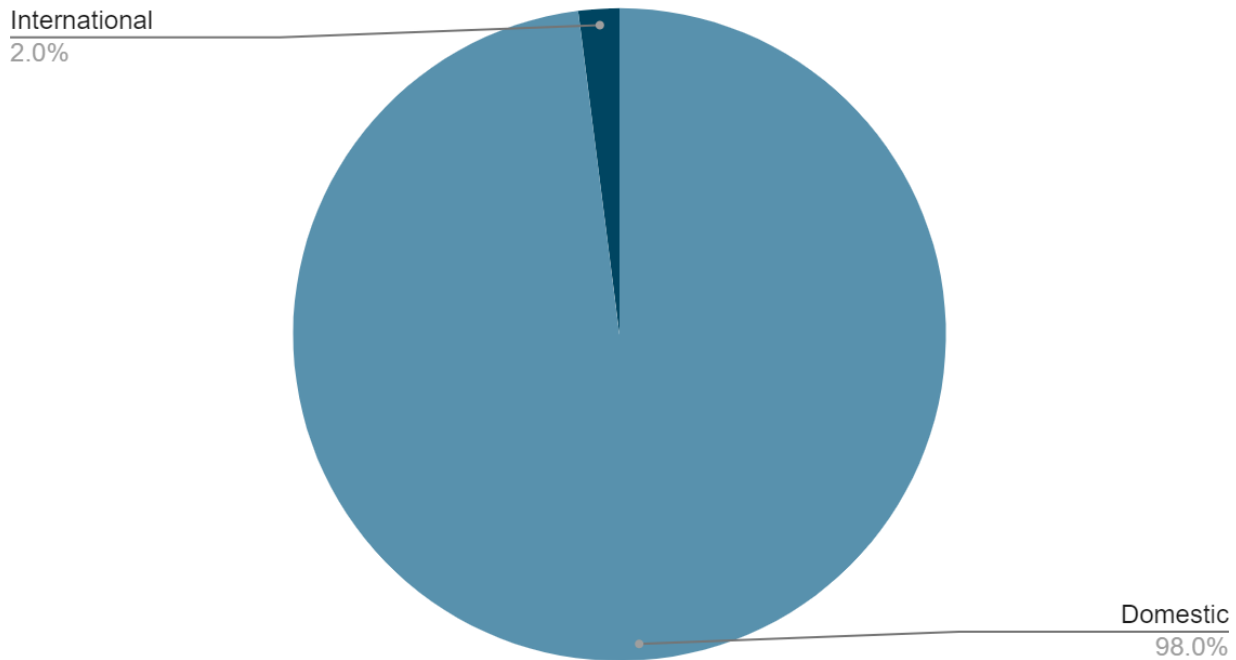
2020 Whitefish Nonresident Expenditures: \$74.5M



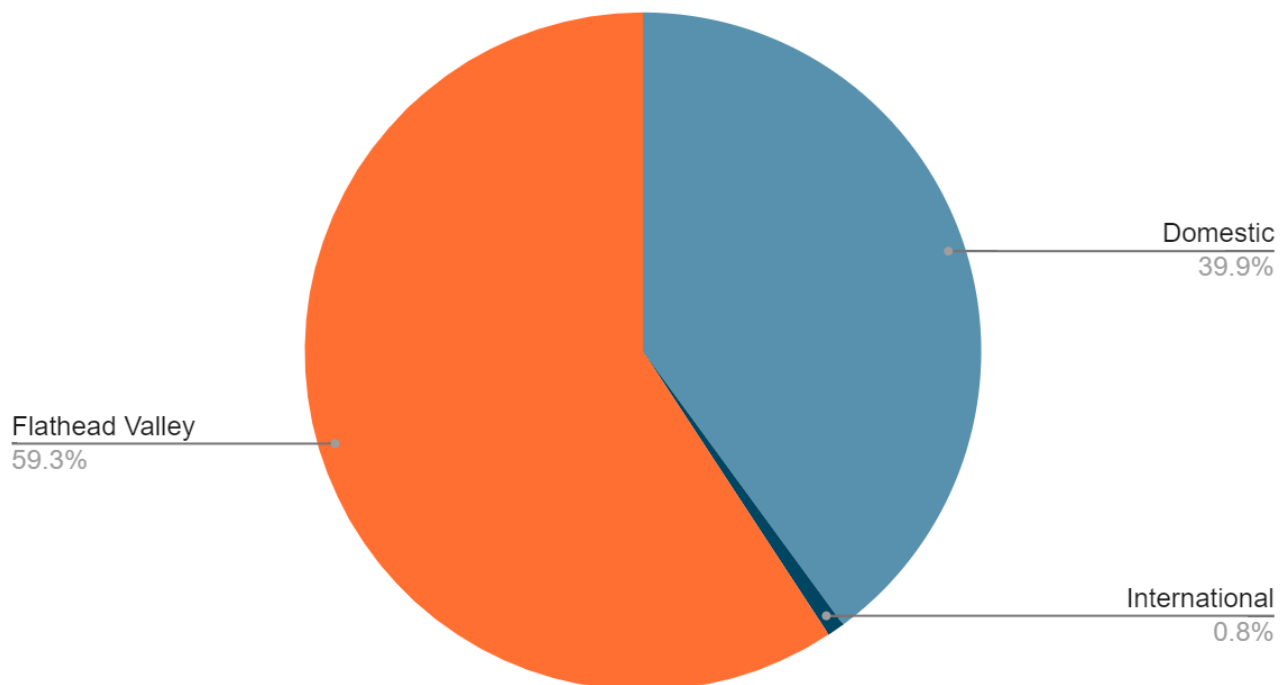
2020 Whitefish Nonresident Expenditures (All): \$148.1M



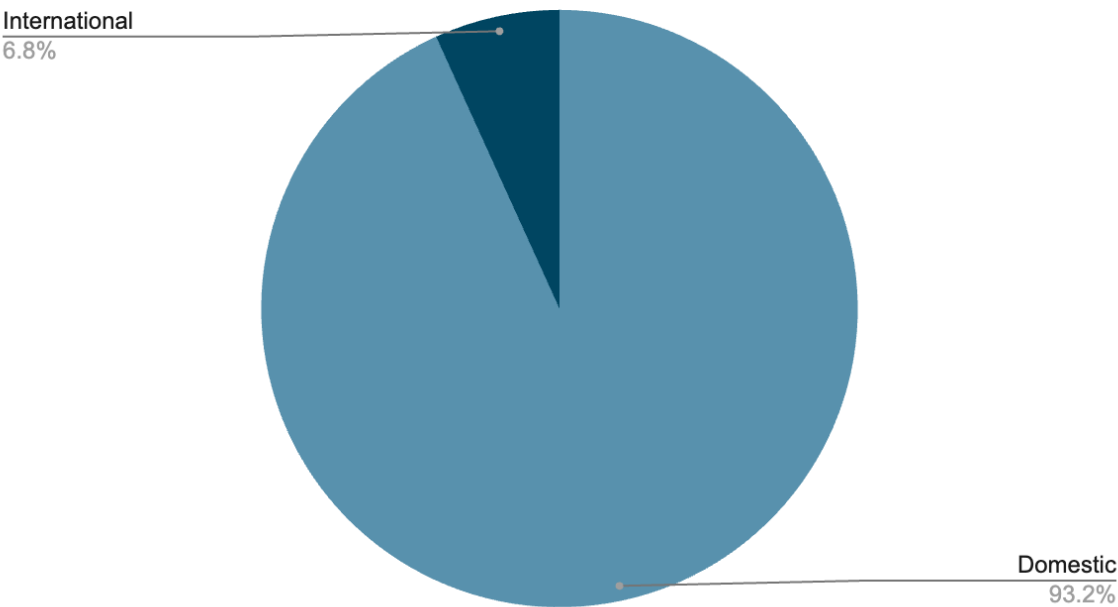
2021 Whitefish Nonresident Expenditures: \$65.5M



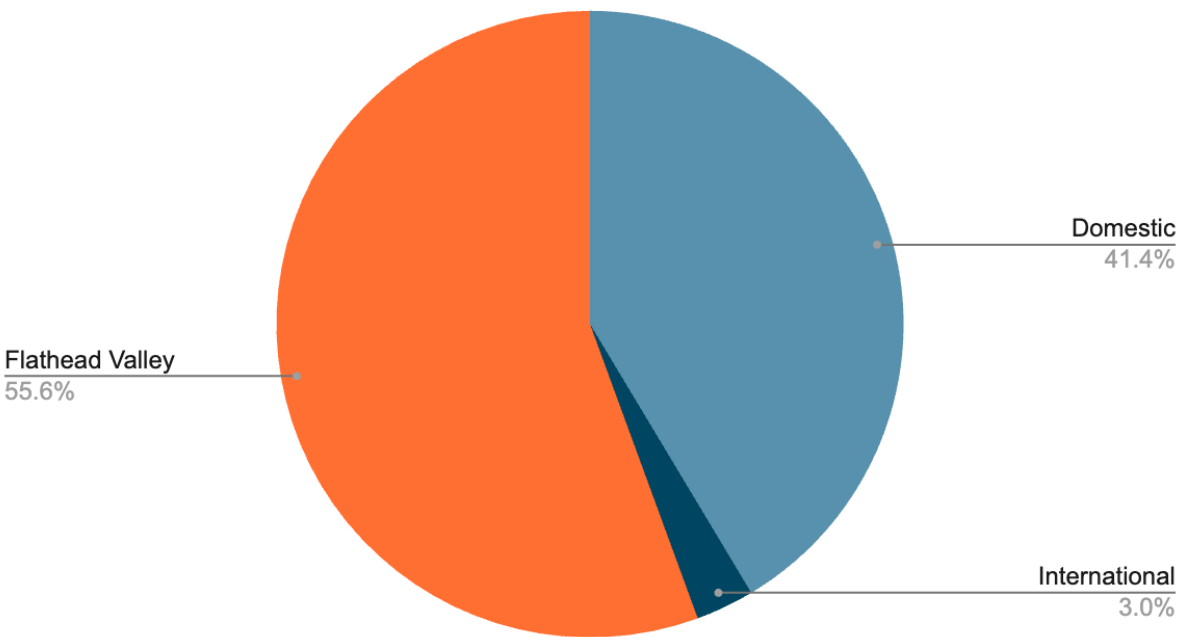
2021 Whitefish Expenditures (All): \$160.8M



2022 Whitefish Nonresident Expenditures: \$76.5M



2022 Whitefish Expenditures (All): \$172.3M



APPENDIX: FY22 - FY24 Strategic Plan

Mission & Vision: November 2021

Mission

Fostering sustainable tourism through inspiration, education, and partnerships to enhance, protect and preserve our viable year-round community.

Previous Version of Mission

Build a high level of visibility and increase our name recognition as a premier year-round destination

Vision

Achieving long-term economic and community sustainability through steadfast destination stewardship.

Previous Version of Vision

Enhance the economy of Whitefish by emphasizing its desirability as a travel and recreation destination to visitors who appreciate and respect the character of place.

WHITEFISH
MONTANA

Marketing & Communications:

Raise awareness of Whitefish as a travel destination and drive destination visitation during the non-peak seasons.

Objectives	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Create and adopt the new annual marketing plan informed by updated mission and vision and changes to state bed tax rules and regulations	X		
Continue to develop, refine, and support safety and recreate responsibly messaging	X	X	X
Pursue opportunities for media partnerships with specific calls to action to inspire visitors and create positive impacts on the community	X	X	X
Create opportunities for destination stewardship storytelling through the PR/earned media program	X	X	X
Continue to enhance cooperative marketing efforts with local, regional, and state partners	X	X	X
Continue to adapt and enhance group sales initiatives during the fall, winter, and spring	X	X	X

Destination Stewardship:

Invest in Whitefish through community engagement and sustainable tourism efforts

Objectives	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Develop and implement community relations plan to educate and create awareness of the positive impacts of the work done by Explore Whitefish	X	X	X
Work with Sustainable Tourism Management Plan Committee (STMP) on high priority action items (short term rentals, recycling, legislative outreach, wildfire, transportation).	X	X	
Engage in tourism advocacy efforts at local, regional, state and national levels	X	X	X
Invest in local infrastructure and build partnerships which have a direct impact on community sustainability.	X	X	X
Promote, support, and monitor initiatives in the area of equity, diversity and inclusivity in Whitefish	X	X	X
Advocate for and support expanded transportation links and solutions	X	X	X
Lead and support updates to the Whitefish Sustainable Tourism Management Plan including benchmarking tools (STMP)			X

WHITEFISH
MONTANA

Sustainable Organization:

Drive continued financial stability for the organization

Objectives	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
Rebrand, Reposition, and Reallocate Funding from the Tourism Promotion Assessment (TPA) to the Community Sustainability Fund (CSF)	X	X	
Continue opportunities for collaboration among local partners (City, Chamber, non-profits)	X	X	X