



## Grant Details

### Grant: 24-52-OOT-DMO-001 - FY24 Central Montana DMO Plan - FY24

<b>Status:</b>	Underway
<b>Program Area:</b>	DOC Office of Tourism
<b>Grantee Organization:</b>	Central Montana
<b>Program Officer:</b>	Barb Sanem
<b>Awarded Amount:</b>	\$576,917.00

## ***DMO Plan Narrative***

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### **1. Describe Your Destination**

*Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.*

Central Montana is comprised of 13 counties in the heart of Montana. Conveniently located between Glacier National Park to the north and Yellowstone National Park to the south, Central Montana offers visitors a refreshingly authentic Montana experience.

From the small town atmosphere and western way of life to the history, wildlife, outdoor recreation, art and adventure that Montana is known for, Central Montana's laid-back lifestyle gives visitors the opportunity to get to know Montana up close and personal.

Central Montana's wide-open spaces, rivers and streams, island mountain ranges, and expansive big skies are the perfect backdrop for visitors to experience a Montana with fewer crowds. Whether taking a river trip through the breathtaking beauty of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, a guided horseback ride into the Bob Marshal Wilderness, or simply spending the day wildlife viewing, birding, fishing or hiking on the many secluded fields, trails and streams throughout the region.

Off the beaten path, Central Montana's charming small towns dot the landscape, giving travelers ample opportunity to meander and explore as they travel through the region. Rich with unique shopping, historic downtowns, distinctive museums, and gracious people, our small towns embody the genuine Montana travelers are often looking for.

Where a rugged past meets a vibrant present, visitors can see the landscapes and absorb the sense of place that inspired renowned western artist Charlie Russell. They can walk in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, explore the diverse cultures of local tribal communities, visit ghost towns and gold mines or travel the dinosaur trail, all within reach of comfort and hospitality.

One-of-a-kind events are plentiful throughout the year, giving visitors a wide variety of art events, rodeos, fairs and music festivals that can be found most weekends between March and October. Winter brings Christmas strolls, snow events and holiday celebrations.

Central Montana's diverse natural landscape, abundant wildlife, rich history and distinctive small towns ensure that Central Montana will be an authentic western experience unlike any other.

## **Strengths**

- Historical experiences – Central Montana is the perfect vacation destination for history buffs. Steeped in history, there are experiences to be had around every corner. The Lewis and Clark trail winds its way through Central Montana with the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center being the icing on the cake. The C.M. Russell Museum is another jewel in the crown of Central Montana, along with numerous other museums throughout the 13 counties.
- Charming small towns with unique experiences.
- Quaint golf courses in almost every community within Central Montana lends itself to a golfing experience that highlights amazing backdrops.
- Gateway communities to the east slope of the Rocky Mountain front, including the Bob Marshall Wilderness, offer adventures and a truly Montana Western experience.
- Scenic Byways: Kings Hill Scenic Byway and the Missouri Breaks Backcountry Byway offer visitors a chance to get off the beaten path. They are the perfect experience to promote to our motorcycle enthusiasts.
- Plenty of birding opportunities are detailed in the Central Montana Birding Brochure.
- Unique signature events such as Red Ants Pants Music Festival, Montana Chokecherry Festival, Whoop UP Days, Western Art Week and numerous other small-town celebrations and art shows.
- One-of-a-kind attractions, like Havre Beneath the Streets and the Charlie Russell Chew Choo.
- Spectacular geology and paleontology with six sites along the Montana Dinosaur Trail.
- Authentic Montana lifestyle is highlighted on the region's farms, ranches, guest ranches, Native American cultures, along with Mainstreet Montana.
- Inclusion in the Eastern Montana Initiative of two of Central Montana's counties and one reservation has helped to identify and elevate tourism potential in those areas. Research generated by the prior EMI campaign is valuable in more closely targeting travelers who enter Central Montana on the eastern side.
- Centrally located between Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park.
- Fun organized trails – Pie a la Road, Brewery Trail and the Barn Quilt Trail.
- Excellent variety of fish and wildlife that are perfect to highlight for wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting.
- Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge and the Slippery Ann Wildlife Viewing Area.

## **Opportunities:**

While many locations in Montana are facing overcrowding and extremely high prices, Central Montana still has plenty of room to explore without crowds. The cost of hotels is still affordable, especially for families that might be on a budget. While reservations are recommended, many activities within Central Montana do not require reservations or are not full and can still accept more visitors. Central Montana is set up to accept more of the visitors that want the Montana experience and take pressure off the locations that are overcrowded.

## **Weaknesses/Challenges**

- Shortage of labor causes limited hours, long wait times and subpar services for many businesses in the service industry.
- The increased cost of gasoline.
- Limited and expensive airfare.
- Conventions are beginning to return after the pandemic but have not reached pre-pandemic numbers
- The lack of restaurants, lodging, attractions and gas stations in our small communities.
- The lack of a large winter resort destination makes marketing the winter months challenging.

## **2. Align with Montana Brand**

***Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.***

### ***More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48***

Central Montana has thousands of acres of public land (short grass prairie, river, mountains, lakes and forests), in addition to farm and ranch land.

### ***Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to natural wonders***

Central Montana is comprised primarily of small charming towns located in close proximity to our unspoiled nature and is anchored by the larger town of Great Falls.

### ***Breathtaking experiences by day, relaxing hospitality at night***

Central Montana's breathtaking experiences are many – from viewing spectacular art to seeing the locations that inspired the art. Our hospitality is as varied as sleeping in a beautifully restored historic hotel, to a river guide pitching a tent along the wild and scenic river or a guest ranch wrangler leading guests on a trail.

### 3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).

Destination Marketing

**Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.**

**3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).**

*This HHI number is not that high of income for people from out of state to target to. You have to remember that our cost of living is lower in Central Montana than the big metro markets that we are advertising into. We need people to have disposable income to be able to travel to Montana and have dollars to spend. Much less than this number they can not afford to travel outside their own markets. This is based on our research.*

*I'd also like to explain that we are using our target audience that was put together by you and your team for FY23 and our FY24 Fall Campaign. This may be adjusted based on results from our Strategic Planning. Happy to factor in any feedback you have.*

Target Geographic Markets: US: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming. Canada: Alberta, Saskatchewan.

Leisure Travelers: Adults 35 years old and older with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children in the summer months. They participate in shopping, visit historic sites and museums and enjoy outdoor activities.

Travelers visiting family and/or friends: Adults 35 years old and older with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. They are in the area to attend a specific event or visit with family and friends. They will be looking to do activities in the area, such as outdoor recreation, enjoy nightlife, breweries and dining. They are also likely to visit museums or other attractions.

Active Travelers: Adults 35-65 years old with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. These are the types of travelers that are most likely to enjoy outdoor activities, such as biking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, skiing and snowmobiling. They are likely to enjoy the nightlife, breweries, and check out unique dining opportunities.

Cultural Travelers: Adults 35-65 years old with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. They seek cultural experiences and enjoy everything cultural a place has to offer, such as museums, galleries and historical sites. They want to learn everything about the place they visit.

#### **Target Psychographics:**

The psychographic characteristics of Central Montana's target market include those who value local businesses and locally grown or produced items, enjoy scenic landscapes and value access to public lands, waterways and open space.

### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?**

Central Montana utilizes the following research to support our DMO strategy:

1. ITRR to refine target audiences.
2. Destinationanalysts.com – travel outlook, insights and updates.
3. Arrivalist (Eastern Montana Initiative)
4. Visa Destination insight into who is visiting the area and what they are purchasing.
5. CentralMontana.com website analytics to measure the success of tactics used. The website also provides data on users and where the users are located.
6. Meta for Business to optimize campaigns and match/find our target audience.
7. Google Analytics provides insight into audiences.
8. Once the research is reviewed, Central Montana's media plan will have specific KPIs to measure the success of individual placements. Many options on the plan will drive traffic to Central Montana's website where views of landing pages, time spent on the site and specific requests will be tracked to measure success. Growth in social channels and expanding our e-newsletter list will allow the region to reach and engage that audience and stay top-of-mind with more frequent information about planning a visit to the region
9. Central Montana also relies on our agency partner to make recommendations that fit our targeting based on their research resources such as Nielsen Ratings and Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings, CEB Iconoculture Consumer Insights, Scarborough Research, SWAD broadcast CPP forecasting, ComScore and Quantcast. These tools provide access to radio and TV ratings, print circulation numbers, web usage stats, core forecasting information, consumer psychographics and media usage trends. These resources help The Wendt Agency create highly targeted and cost-effective media strategies.

### **3c. What are your emerging markets?**

**Astro-Tourism:** Montana's Trail to the Star spans the eastern region of Montana and will ultimately include more than 50 locations, all ideal for stargazing. Therefore, we are investing in our agency's creative services and video production for an increase in our creative content designed to highlight places to view the night sky within our area.

**Agri-Tourism:** Many within our target market are looking for safe, family vacations that return them to an unhurried, more grounded experience. Highlighting rural events, lifestyles and products produced on our region's farms and ranches will increase visitor awareness and can ultimately provide supplemental income for agricultural and ranching operations.

## **4. Define and describe your overall goals.**

***A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.***

**Goal 1:** Successfully market the region as a whole, showcasing its unique diversity and remote locations.

**Goal 2:** Promote our rural communities on our website, social media and in our paid media efforts.

**Goal 3:** Increase visitor awareness and participation in astrotourism within the region.

**Goal 4:** Increase visitor awareness and participation in agritourism within the region.

**Goal 5:** Work with our website design and development agency to have a re-designed website.

***4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.***

**Goal 1 Tactics:** Create a new strategic marketing video highlighting Central Montana for use in the paid marketing efforts.

**Goal 2 Tactics:** Effectively help visitors travel around our region with confidence. Develop travel itineraries and community profile videos for visiting rural and urban Central Montana communities that can highlight the ease of doing many activities within the region. These profile videos and itineraries will be the launching point to develop fresh content for videos and landing pages on the website.

- Local Restaurants
- Local Activities
- Local Events
- Local Businesses that benefit from tourism

**Goal 3 Tactics:** Create 1 New Astrotourism promotional video that can be used to increase landing page traffic and visit time. This video will also be used in digital media placements that are clickable so that we can accurately measure the best platforms for media placements.

**Goal 4 Tactics:** Create 1 New Agritourism promotional videos that can be used to increase landing page traffic and visit time. This video will also be used in digital media placements that are clickable so that we can accurately measure the best platforms for media placements.

**Goal 5 Tactics:** Respond to our 5 Year Strategic Planning Analysis Project in late FY23. Closely monitor all media efforts and stay responsive to positive trends for our best performing landing pages.

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