



Grant Details

125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

128706 - FY24 Southeast Montana DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

Grant Title:	FY24 Southeast Montana DMO Plan		
Grant Number:	24-52-OOT-DMO-004		
Grant Status:	Underway		
Comments:			
Applicant Organization:	Visit Southeast Montana		
Grantee Contact:	Brenda Maas		
Award Year:	FY24		
Program Area:	DOC Office of Tourism		
Amounts:			
Contract Dates:	Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed
Project Dates:	06/13/2023 Proposal Date	07/01/2023 Project Start	06/30/2024 Project End
Grant Administrator:	Barb Sanem		
Contract Number	24-52-OOT-DMO-004		
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Project Dates 07/01/2023

06/30/2024

Project Start	Project End
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Comments
Amendment Comments

DMO Plan Narrative

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.

Southeast Montana is a region of complexities and juxtapositions, a land of vast, open spaces, a place of surprising twists and turns as unexpected as the flowing rivers. The region is a small portion of the Crow Tribe's ancestral land and modern-day home to the Northern Cheyenne nation, and it is ranching, spread farther than naked eyes can see, dotted with small communities more than a century old.

From the state's largest city, Billings, with its walkable downtown and expansive growth along the middle Yellowstone River, to one of the smallest towns, like Ekalaka, which created its identity from the very fossils found in the surrounding area, the Southeast Montana region offers visitors niche experiences of the real Montana.

The Yellowstone River, the longest undammed river in the lower 48 states, flows through the region, alongside I-94 to North Dakota – this is the same route that Capt. Lewis Clark used to navigate back to St. Louis, and includes his timeless signature carved into Pompeys Pillar. Today we can dare to explore the same river using the Lower Yellowstone River Trail (still under development by Montana FWP). Other rivers, like the Tongue and Bighorn, which flow north into Montana, are dammed and create recreational oases. The massive Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, which contains the 71-mile long Bighorn Lake (locally known as Yellowtail) beneath towering 1,000-foot-high red cliffs, dwarfs and stuns visitors with its raw beauty.

It is this ruggedness, this stark contrast of seemingly benign rolling prairies and flowing rivers that gives way to natural breaks and unexpected Eastern Montana badlands.

Created by prehistoric rivers, the Terry Badlands and Makoshika State Park badlands, hold more secrets to be discovered amongst the crevices and coulees. Explore them by day or watch as the setting sun stains the land in elusive shades of mauve, pink and gold that remain indescribable.

Nighttime provides another opportunity to be awed by Southeast Montana. Visit any one of the 40-plus locations along Montana's Trail to the Stars and be mesmerized by incredible views of stars beyond compare. Medicine Rocks State Park, located between Baker and Ekalaka, stands as the anchor site of this trail and only one of two International Dark-Skies "sanctuaries" in the state.

Southeast Montana is rich in history, with the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument (operated by NPS) serving ~250,000 visitors each year. With nearly 20 museums and cultural centers, the history buff can spend days in the region. Our history maps help navigate this journey, as will the upcoming Trail to the Little Bighorn project. As a bonus, many museums are no-cost and docents are locals who love sharing the story of the community with visitors.

While dinosaurs once roamed these craggy lands, they never get old out here. From a personal dig on private property to the award-winning annual Shindig in Ekalaka, to the Montana Dinosaur Trail, both the young and the young-at-heart will find an experience to treasure in Southeast Montana. The Musselshell Museum in Roundup recently added a paleontological exhibit and is working to join the Montana Dinosaur Trail.

Signature events like the Miles City Bucking Horse Sale, Buzzard Day (Makoshika), Reenactment of the Battle of Little Bighorn, Roundup Independence Day Extravaganza (RIDE), Crow Fair & Powwow and NILE Rodeo bring visitors from across the globe to Southeast Montana. Newer, smaller events like Makoshika Triathlon continue to attract a more interactive and competitive crowd.

Those visiting Southeast Montana can taste Montana in nearly every town by following the Southeast Montana Burger Trail (which will be expanded with a digital application in FY24). While in Billings, the Brew Trail and newly expanded Trailhead Treats offer alternatives. Plus, the region is home to several James Beard Award nominees and winners – and not just where one would expect – but also The Backporch in Roundup.

Southeast Montana is a place of Big Space and Big Tastes.

WE'RE BIG OUT HERE

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

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

A BRIEF HISTORY

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

THE ORGANIZATION

Visit Southeast Montana is a nonprofit organization managed by the Billings Chamber of Commerce. We serve as a voice for Southeast Montana's tourism and hospitality industries, seeking to promote the region's many attractions, events and communities while ensuring that tourism is recognized as one of the region's top economic drivers, especially when changes to local and state-wide legislation are considered. Visit Southeast Montana consists of two full-time staff members under contract with the Montana Department of Commerce and is directed by a board consisting of no more than 21 members from across the region. Visit Southeast Montana partners with the region's two Convention & Visitors Bureaus (Billings, Miles City and Glendive) along with hoteliers, chambers of commerce and other tourism-related entities including state parks, county and federal organizations, plus private businesses ranging from coffee shops and restaurants to guide services, art galleries and private tour operators. The stakeholders and tourism partners of Southeast Montana provide the essence, flavor, identity and unique character of the region.

MISSION OF VISIT SOUTHEAST MONTANA:

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

OUR VISION: Southeast Montana will become the trusted source for free-spirited travelers to achieve their legendary life experiences, based on these key characteristics that align with the Montana Brand.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

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

Strengths:

- Outdoor Recreation (the wide-open spaces & public land)
- Historical Significance
- Western Authenticity
- Dinosaur Adventures
- Crow & Northern Cheyenne Culture
- Interstates I-90 & I-94 funnel road-trippers into the region – and is “on the way” to YNP and GNP
- Billings – Montana’s largest city
- Wide open spaces – post-pandemic travelers (lower COVID rates/less people)
- Aligns with Brand MT, which has stated effort to divert visitor traffic away from national parks into all areas of Montana
- Signature Events – Bucking Horse Sale; Crow Fair; RIDE – plus new events
- Destination Development projects gaining momentum

At the same time, Visit Southeast Montana faces very real challenges, including:

- Perception that Montana is far away and difficult to travel to
- Distance between services/remote areas (
- Irregular mobile phone coverage
- Regions are confusing and no applicable for travelers
- Underdeveloped tourism product(s)

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

The Montana Brand consists of three pillars:

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

Visit Southeast Montana aligns with the Montana Brand in a plethora of ways. Makoshika State Park, Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area and Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area boast spectacular, unspoiled nature. These vast and stunning public lands are complemented with the wide-open spaces where the mountains roll out to meet the prairies and the Yellowstone River freely flows. In addition, Southeast Montana holds historical beauty in the Little Bighorn Battlefield and lesser-known historical locations and monuments like Rosebud Battlefield State Park, Tongue River Reservoir State Park and Four Dances Recreation Area.

We offer vibrant and evolving small towns – from Roundup to Baker, Forsyth to Hardin and Miles City to Baker – each with its own unique charm. Glendive is not only the gateway to Makoshika State Park, it and Wibaux are the gateways to Montana. Crow Agency, Fort Smith and Hardin also welcome visitors to the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument and Bighorn Canyon. And, of course, we are the home of Billings, Montana’s Trailhead – the state’s largest, incredibly progressive city.

With all these options of breathtaking experiences by day, our visitors deserve relaxing hospitality at night – including the newly-launched and awarded Montana Trail to the Stars. In Southeast Montana relaxing lodging options range from the luxurious Northern Hotel in Billings to the rustic (and haunted) Kempton Hotel in Terry – the longest continually operating lodging facility in the state. Over the past year, we launched the Southeast Montana Burger Trail, with more than 20 locations in communities across the region, and two businesses – Veronika’s Bakery and The Backporch in Roundup – are nominees for the prestigious James Beard Awards. Southeast Montana contains all amazing the ingredients necessary for relaxing hospitality, Montana-style.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

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

Destination Marketing, Destination Development

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

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

Visit Southeast Montana parallels the target market identified by Brand MT, as identified here:

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

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

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

As stated previous, we follow Brand MT's target market, based on the research by Destination Analysts, which is further supported here, where we drill down to niche audiences:

10 OF THE TOP 12 DESIRED ACTIVITIES ALIGN WITH VISIT SOUTHEAST MONTANA'S PILLARS.

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

At this time, Visit Southeast Montana plans to focus on HPVs in drive geo-markets with these Target Markets:

- Brand MT's target markets:
- High-value family traveler
- Niche: History buffs & Road trippers from MidwestRegional travelers - within 10-to-12-hour drive radius of Miles City (center of region)
- Travelers on way to/from Yellowstone National Park and/or Glacier
- Western Montanans, especially outdoor adventurers

This is further supported with data from **Visit Southeast Montana's 2022 Conversion Study** (attached), which identifies Midwest Roadtrippers and direct flight markets as shown **Image 2**.

Additionally, the Conversion Study reinforces our understanding of the target market's desire to experience the natural beauty of Montana's wide-open spaces and outdoor recreation opportunities yet have affordable options within a "drivable distance." We also see direct-flight markets, culinary experiences and cultural experiences as factoring into a visitor's decision to visit Southeast Montana region (see **Image 3**).

Lastly, we noted that potential visitors wish to hike and fish, experience small-town charm and visit historical sites and museums, as per **Image 4** from the Conversion Study:

3c. What are your emerging markets?

In addition, we have identified the following Emerging Markets:

- Outdoor Recreationists:
- Specifically, water sports like kayaking and rafting
- Lower Yellowstone River water-based trail (continuing to build out)
- Night Sky Observers/Astrotourism, and
- Culinary Travelers - specific to the Southeast Montana Burger Trail (which received an EMI grant to expand with a digital passport program)

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.

What is the strategic role of Visit Southeast Montana as a DMO?

We are primarily a **Destination Marketing Organization** (~75%), with basis in promoting regional visitation. At the same time, we are also a **Destination Development Organization** (~25%).

As we evolve into this dual identity, we will look for, develop and market regional assets. *Montana's Trail to the Stars* & *Montana's Dinosaur Trail* are both strong examples of tourism product development in this region.

In FY24 we will utilize a grant from the Eastern Montana Tourism Initiative to expand the one-year-old Southeast Montana Burger Trail by adding a digital passport, print and distribute more maps, elevate with paid advertising and promote with a participation contest.

We are also the lead on a new project, Badlands to Breaks to Beartooths (working name), which will route road-trippers between these three distinctive land features of Eastern Montana. The project is funded by a Montana Tourism Grant and includes four regions (Yellowstone Country; Missouri River Country; Central Montana; and Visit Southeast Montana) and is massive undertaking. We expect the project to launch in March/April of 2024.

All our goals support our Destination Development efforts, but specifically Goal #1 (dedicate 5% of paid media budget to destination development projects) and Goal 5 (connecting with tourism partners at a local level) demonstrate how our destination development work melds with marketing work. This combination allows us – and our tourism partners - to identify and grow “products” that are unique to this corner of Montana.

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In addition, the Visit Southeast Montana Board of Directors (Executive Board) is planning a retreat for fall of 2023, at which we will specifically explore new strategies to support visitor services across the region. In the past, we have provided grants to (3) VICs; however, the Board wants to have a more broad impact in all regional communities (current budget includes a \$100 placeholder; will adjust budget after retreat and audit using rollover funds).

Overall Strategy

Visit Southeast Montana strives to increase awareness of and visitation to the Visit Southeast Montana region as a destination for outdoor recreation, historical significance and dinosaur adventures along with Western authenticity plus Crow and Northern Cheyenne culture, as desired by each tribe.

We will continue to follow the Montana Brand while elevating Visit SEMT's pillars and destination development projects to targeted audience, while simultaneously working with tourism partners within the region to grow regional pride and identity, tourism products and awareness. We will execute the FY24 Marketing Plan with these strategic objectives and goals defined below.

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

Visit Southeast Montana will continue website renovation (started in FY23) and enhancements, including video, to strengthen this core marketing component while adding Destination Development elements. We will specifically target content, like the e-newsletter and travel guide orders, to those already interested in visiting GNP by utilizing a new partnership with the Glacier National Park Conservancy. In addition to our foundational and strategic paid media plan, we will promote our Destination Development projects, specifically: Montana Dinosaur Trail; Montana's Trail to the Stars; Southeast Montana Burger Trail; and Trail to the Little Bighorn. And we will continue to support our regional partners, functioning as the conduit between Brand MT and all the communities of Visit Southeast Montana region. Lastly, we will again survey visitors and potential visitors in the fall of 2023 to glean insights and trends specific to the Visit Southeast Montana region.

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Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
<p>Strategic Goal #3 – Connect with visitors who are already planning to visit YNP & GNP to elevate the Southeast Montana region as an option on their way to/from the parks.</p>	<p>Objective 1 - Generate 7,000 new leads by partnering with GNP Conservancy Call Center.</p> <p>Objective 2 - Increase reach to YNP travelers and gather 3,000 new email addresses by partnering with <i>Yellowstone Journal</i>.</p> <p>We will note number of e-blast subscribers on [DATE: July 1, 2023] with successful objectives increasing that number by at least 10,000 subscribers in FY24.</p>	<p>Objective 1 – We collected more than 7,000 leads via the Glacier National Park Conservancy partnership.</p> <p>Objective 2 – Employing the e-mail Opt-in function of paid advertising with <i>Yellowstone Journal</i>, we added 3,496 new leads to our database in FY24.</p> <p>In FY24, we increased the email database from 40,951 (FY23) to 49,073, an increase of 8,122 email leads.</p>	<p>Yes, we met both goals defined in Objectives 1 and 2; however, the goal of 10,000 additional email addresses was not met. Based on an increase of nearly 20%, we do consider this method a success and yes, we will employ it in the future, with some modifications.</p>
<p>Strategic Goal #2 – Continue to add to online content on Visit Southeast Montana-owned channels and non-owned channels (earned media) and use this to drive traffic to <i>southeastmontana.com</i>.</p>	<p>Objective 1 - Gather and create more seasonal content (images, video, copy) & add seasonal content to website; execute additional photo/video shoot to increase fall photo library by at least (15) images.</p> <p>Objective 2: Maximize editorial calendar by writing & distributing (1) news release/month.</p> <p>We will use Google Analytics to track website traffic to <i>southeastmontana.com</i>; if we increase traffic to</p>	<p>Objective 1: In FY24 we gathered, procured and created more seasonal content and executed a fall photo shoot. In total, between photo shoots, photo call/purchases and partnerships, we added an astounding 815 new images to the Visit Southeast Montana photo library. That includes 37 winter images; 60 fall images; and 292 spring images.</p> <p>Objective 2: We produced and distributed (5) news releases during FY24, compared to the goal of 12 (or 1 release per month).</p>	<p>Yes, we met objective 1 and no, we did not quite achieve objective 2. Yes, we met and exceeded the metric of increasing website traffic by 10% and yes, we will employ these methods again, with some modifications.</p>

	<p><i>southeastmontana.com</i> by 10% in FY24 over FY23, we will consider this method a success.</p>	<p><u>FY23 website traffic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors: 532,561 • Pageviews: 1,105,429 <p><u>FY24 website traffic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitors: 671,842 • Pageviews: 1,608,387 <p>Based on the data presented, in FY24 <i>southeastmontana.com</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased Website Visitors by 26.15% • Increased Website Pageview by 45.5% 	
<p>Strategic Goal #1: Continue to utilize paid advertising to elevate Visit SEMT's pillars while advancing existing Destination Development projects.</p>	<p>Objective 1 – Maintain minimum paid media budget of \$150K for pillars and Destination Development projects.</p> <p>Objective 2 – Elevate Destination Development projects by dedicating 5% of paid advertising budget (\$7,500) to each of (4) DD projects: MT Dino Trail; MT's Trail to the Stars; MT Burger Trail; Trail to the Little Bighorn (\$30K total).</p> <p>This method will be consider a success if we increase the effectiveness of paid media by increasing impressions and engagement (CTR, etc.) 10% in FY24 over FY23.</p>	<p>Objective 1: In FY24 we spent a total of \$173,252 on paid media, which included joint venture dollars for promotion of Visit Southeast Montana's brand pillars (outdoor recreation; Western authenticity; historical significance; dinosaur adventures, and Native American culture along with destination development projects.</p> <p>Objective 2: In FY24 we underspent on specific destination development projects. Instead, they were woven into the overall paid media plan and creative, with the Southeast Montana Burger Trail supported by a Montana Tourism Grant.</p> <p>The overall paid media plan increased total</p>	<p>Yes, we met objective 1 and no, we did not meet objective 2. Yes, we met the metrics of increasing impressions and engagement (CTR, etc.) by at least 10% over FY23.</p> <p>Yes, we do consider both objectives successful, based on the overall paid media plan performance and yes, we will continue to use this method in the future with some modifications to the 2nd objective.</p>

		impressions by 128.19% and overall CTR 20.23%.	
<p>Strategic Goal #4: Utilize new call center to increase understanding of our visitors by executing a survey every fall with minimum of 300 responses.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Execute conversion study of at least 300 participants. Compare results with study from 2022.</p> <p>This method will be successful when we execute the Survey with at least 300 visitors and present the results to the Board at Jan/Feb 2024 Board meeting, in advance of FY25 planning.</p>	<p>In conjunction with our AOR and Call Center (both are Windfall), we conducted a visitor survey in the late fall of 2023. A total of 232 responses were collected and results were presented to the Visit Southeast Montana Board of Directors at the winter 2024 meeting, in advance of FY25 planning.</p>	<p>No, we did not completely meet the metric. Although the total number of responses fell a bit short, yes, we do consider this method a success and yes, we'll continue to employ it with some modifications – we are already in the process of conducting a survey for FY25 (fall of 2024). This will give us three years of region-specific data.</p>
<p>Strategic Goal #5: Connect with more tourism partners across the region to become the resource for destination development and tourism marketing.</p>	<p>Objective 1: Host at least (5) regional roundtables in FY24.</p> <p>Objective 2: Increase reach (open rate) of weekly e-blast to tourism partners by 1.5% over FY23 and add 40 additional subscribers to e-blast list [from what is in database on July 1, 2023].</p> <p>This method will be successful if at least (3) tourism partners, in each of (5) communities, attend the roundtable and have one-on-one conversations with staff and board members.</p>	<p>We did not execute this method in FY24; however, the Resiliency Plan Task Force (which was an unexpected component of FY24) recommended a region-wide Tourism Ambassador Program that will replace the connections at regional roundtables. The Tourism Ambassador Program was added to the budget for FY25 using rollover funds. We also gave eight presentations in FY24, which were attended by approximately 300 people.</p>	<p>No, we did not meet the objective and it was not successful; we will modify this objective if we use it in the future.</p> <p>As this method was not executed, it cannot be a success. However, we did track outreach/presentations, plus the end product of the Resiliency Planning Task Force, Visit Southeast Montana's Resiliency Plan is posted here: https://commerce.mt.gov/_shared/brand/docs/Resilience-Plans/Southeast-Montana-Resilience-Plan.pdf.</p> <p>We consider all outreach into the region—and beyond—a success and a necessary marketing and internal PR component for Visit Southeast Montana. We will continue to consider all outreach efforts, including those noted in the Resiliency Plan.</p>

DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$164,862.00	13.88	\$149,651.22	90.8
Agency Services	\$105,000.00	8.84	\$105,843.75	100.8
Cooperative Marketing	\$20,000.00	1.68	\$9,302.76	46.5
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$30,100.00	2.53	\$18,180.66	60.4
Education/Outreach	\$20,600.00	1.73	\$16,454.84	79.9
Joint Venture	\$75,000.00	6.31	\$35,294.13	47.1
Marketing Resources	\$8,000.00	0.67	\$5,790.66	72.4
Opportunity Marketing	\$115,000.00	9.68	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$305,337.00	25.7	\$291,311.78	95.4
Marketing Personnel	\$120,500.00	10.14	\$120,572.80	100.1
Product Development	\$37,500.00	3.16	\$66,898.71	178.4
Research	\$12,600.00	1.06	\$9,793.75	77.7
Travel/Trade Shows	\$3,100.00	0.26	\$2,697.71	87.0
Visitor Services	\$85,600.00	7.21	\$58,957.06	68.9
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$85,000.00	7.15	\$75,368.56	88.7
	\$1,188,199.00	100.00	\$966,118.39	

Narrative Evaluation

Narrative for Strategic Goal #1

Overall, the results of our FY24 are impressive and the result of key targeting, optimizing, a diversity of media buys and sharp creative. In fact, we launched a new campaign: *Nowhere Better* in FY24 to emphasize that there's *Nowhere Better* to...

- gain perspective (wide open spaces)
- hit the open road (road trips)
- horse around (Western adventures)
- for epic adventures (outdoor rec)
- for a bucking good time (rodeo)
- to dig in (dinosaurs)

- to dig into history
- to find some space (stargazing)
- to honor traditions (tribal culture)
- to dig in (Burger Trail)
- to get a taste of Montana (Burger Trail)

See the *Creative Suite* attachment for creative samples; see the *FY24 Media Plan Performance report* for details.

We also add more video to the paid media plan, using new and accumulated footage. For example, the streaming video campaign was especially effective:

- 1,724,432 impressions
- 1,470,330 videos completed
- 87.18% VCR (video completion rate)
- Compared to benchmark of 75%

In another example, *True West* magazine continued to be strong for history content with a 31.75% open rate (compared to industry standard of 19.5%) on a native article email promotion. While a newer buy with *SmithsonianMag.com* performed well with 46-53% open rates (vs. 19.5% industry standard).

Our paid social media efforts continue to perform well with an overall 2.22% CTR and low CPC (cost per click). Specifically, the MonDak (Montana-Dakota Motorcycle Route) promoted around Sturgis Bike Rally in August 2023, garnered an outstanding 6.55% CTR and incredibly low CPC at \$.36/click.

Lastly, we supplemented the Southeast Montana Burger Trail paid media campaign, which was funded by a Tourism Grant, and gained more solid results. The overall mini-campaign produced 1.89% CTR with nearly 100,000 impressions and 1:28 time-on-site via a Minnesota Monthly. Following this thread, Minnesota is the number one state (other than MT) downloading the Burger Trail passport and also the first state to have a resident awarded a Burger Trail T-shirt for checking into 8 Burger Trail locations.

Overall, we are quite pleased with the FY24 Paid Media Campaign and will continue to build on this momentum.

Narrative of Strategic Goal #2

The numbers truly tell the story with this method. In FY24, we increased website visitors by 26.15% and page views 45.5% over FY23. This not only exceeds the 10% increase goal but also indicates a strong and integrated marketing plan, supported by a solid paid media performance (as indicated in Strategic Goal #1 above).

In addition, we dramatically increased seasonal content with a few major projects:

- Social media influencers during winter months/weather
- Partnering with a major fishing outlet for spring content
- Executing a photo shoot, using “empty nester” models during the fall season

In total, between photo shoots, photo call/purchases and partnerships, we added an astounding 815 new images to the Visit Southeast Montana photo library. That includes 37 winter images; 60 fall images; and 292 spring images, plus a plethora of b-roll.

See *semt sample images attachment for examples.*

Equally important, southeastmontana.com website performance continues to increase YOY. In the past three years, since FY22, we have increased website visitor traffic by 167% and pageviews by 378%.

While we did not hit the goal on news releases, we realize that the bandwidth of staff is maximized. To increase earned media, we would need to shift staff time from other ventures or add staff. Both options are being considered.

At the same time, the news releases we sent were well received. Topics included:

- Art Installation at BIL airport
- Burger Boss/Southeast Montana Burger Trail Passport Launch
- Bighorn River Featured on The New Fly Fisher
- Makoshika State Park Featured on RV There Yet?
- 2024 Travel Guide Released

The Burger Trail news release garnered the most attention, including a radio segment on Yellowstone Public Radio - *Flavors Under the Big Sky* by Stella Fong and a front-page feature by Jake Iverson that ran in the *Billings Gazette* and across the Lee Enterprise network.

The (5) releases averaged a 30.20% open rate, which is in line with industry averages. Overall, we feel this method was successful and we will continue to build on these strategies and assets.

Narrative to Strategic Goal #3

While we were a bit short of the goal of adding 10,000 new emails to our database, we know, as observed while importing spreadsheets each month, that we often have duplicate email addresses. It is likely that visitors may be interested in multiple locations in Montana, specifically YNP and GNP (as targeted) or opt-in to more than one source of information, thus creating duplicate contacts. In addition, individuals often unsubscribe from email lists, so there's continual natural attrition with the database. (See Attachment)

FY24 was our first full year with the Windfall Call Center, which tracked:

- Travel guide mailings
- Bulk mailing destination
- Top states of inquiry origin
- Top areas of interest
- Top ad codes
- Top contact method

The Top 5 states: Texas; Illinois; Florida; Wisconsin and Michigan (3 Midwestern states) align with our paid media geo-targets (with the exception of Florida). We added Travel Guides Free to our paid media strategy, which is the top ad code, along with Yellowstone Journal and the Glacier NP Conservancy partnership; this indicates success with these buys.

Lastly, the Top Contact Method – website guestbook—demonstrates the success of our strategies to drive traffic to the website with the outstanding results reported in Strategic Goal #2 [above]. This is an ideal example of how our integrated marketing plan is woven together in multiple ways.

Strategic Goal #4 Narrative

The information provided by our annual Conversion Survey guides decisions and growth for Visit Southeast Montana. For example, the FY24 survey indicated growth in the number of visitors who spent more than one day in the region and who had a SEMT base during their visit (Q3). We also learned that those surveyed used the annual travel guide as their primary source of information, followed by the website (Q5).

Of those surveyed, 8% are from Texas and 7% from Minnesota – we are spot-on with geo-target markets (Q7). In terms of activities, similar to state data, the survey reported the top five as:

- Hiking (51%)
- Historical Sites (44%)
- Wildlife Watching (42%)
- Camping (22%)
- Fishing (21%)

Lastly, we learned that non-peak times, like September, are important for travel (Q2). As thus, we continue to stretch the paid media budget past June for those planning fall travel. This data is region-specific and often supports what we already know, allowing us to continue building and executing a strong annual marketing plan. *See One-Sheet_FY24 FINAL attachment for details.*

Strategic Goal #5 Narrative

Although we were unable to complete this method as originally described, we feel that Visit Southeast Montana, as an organization, is recognized as a regional leader in tourism. We have increased participation in tourism grants offered by the Department of Commerce; our Board of Directors is dynamic and includes tribal representation; and our destination development projects, specifically the Southeast Montana Burger Trail, have created a synergy from Billings, the largest city, to Ekalaka, the smallest community.

In addition, the work done via the Resiliency Task Force in FY24 set the stage for a region-wide Tourism Ambassador Program – a top priority on the plan (*Page 8/Imperative 3: Community Stewardship on the Resiliency Plan attachment*) along with a region-wide database or digital asset management (DAM) system for all tourism partners to access. More details on that via the Resiliency Plan Implementation Grant Application.

Additionally, we worked steadily in the agritourism realm, with staff serving on the Agritourism Advisory Committee and twice guiding the MSU Tourism Fellows (research project lead by Dr. Shannon Arnold) on tours within the region, including a breakfast between the Billings Chamber of Commerce's Ag Committee (largest in the state) and the Fellows. Outreach, education and connection remains a priority for Visit Southeast Montana to serve as the conduit between Destination MT and all community and partners across the region.

DMO Plan Attachments

Description	File Name	File Size
FY24 Call Center Dashboard	FY24 Call Center Dashboard.pdf	67 KB
FY24 Paid Media Performance Report	SEMT FY24 Media Plan_PERFORMANCE THRU OCTOBER.PDF	88 KB
FY24 Paid Media Performance Report	SEMT FY24 Media Plan_PERFORMANCE THRU OCTOBER.PDF	88 KB
FY24 Sample Images	semt sample images.pdf	2.9 MB
FY24 Sample Images	semt sample images.pdf	2.9 MB
FY24 Creative Suite	SEMT_Creative Suite FY24_030824_FINAL.pdf	108.5 MB
FY24 Creative Suite	SEMT_Creative Suite FY24_030824_FINAL.pdf	108.5 MB
FY24 Survey One-Sheet	SEMT_OneSheet_FY24 FINAL.pdf	2.4 MB
FY24 Survey One-Sheet	SEMT_OneSheet_FY24 FINAL.pdf	2.4 MB
SEMT Resiliency Plan	Southeast-Montana-Resilience- Plan_FINAL.pdf	5.4 MB
SEMT Resiliency Plan	Southeast-Montana-Resilience- Plan_FINAL.pdf	5.4 MB
SEMT Resiliency Plan	Southeast-Montana-Resilience- Plan_FINAL.pdf	5.4 MB