



## Grant Details

### 125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

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128704 - FY24 Whitefish DMO Annual Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

**Grant Title:** FY24 Whitefish DMO Annual Plan  
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# **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.*

### **Whitefish, Montana - Who we are:**

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, 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.

**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.**

### **About Explore Whitefish & Purpose Of This DMO 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 Management 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. 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 visitation** 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 crosscountry 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.

**Spring and Fall visitation** motivations for travel revolve around active experiences in and around Glacier National Park and Whitefish such as scenic driving, wildlife viewing, hiking, birding, golf, flyfishing, 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 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.

#### **Preferred Visitors: Who we wish to attract:**

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.

High Potential Visitors for Montana Brand Montana engaged in a destination brand research study with Destination Analysts in which the characteristics of the most desirable visitors to Montana were defined. The “High Potential Visitor” profile aligns with the demographics and psychographics of the geotraveler that Explore Whitefish has been marketing to and has had significant success.

#### **Montana's Visitor Characteristics**

##### **NON-RESIDENT WHITEFISH VISITOR CHARACTERISTICS (Source: 2022 ITRR 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)**

- 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

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

### **Montana's Visitor Characteristics - Why they come:**

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

### **Winter Enthusiasts "High Potential Visitor"**

For Montana, Brand Montana engaged in a destination research study with Destination Analysts in which the characteristics of the most desirable visitors to Montana during the winter season were defined. The "Winter Enthusiasts" profile aligns with the demographics and psychographics of the geotraveler that Explore Whitefish has been marketing to and has had significant success.

Whitefish Winter Traveler Profile:

OVERVIEW OF SNOWSPORTS VISITS 12021/2022 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)

**Cycling Traveler "High Potential Visitor"**

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 Stud)

- 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

#### RESPONDENT BICYCLE BEHAVIOR IN MONTANA (Source: 2016 ITRR Non-Glacier NP Bicycle Study)

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

#### STRENGTHS:

##### 1. 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

2. 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).

3. 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.

4. 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.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

1. Invest in local infrastructure and build partnerships which have a direct impact on community sustainability

2. Reach peak season visitors by educating them with responsible travel messaging during their stay in Whitefish and the surrounding area.
3. 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.
4. 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.

## CHALLENGES

1. 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:

- Impacts to the inventory of housing for local residents
- Illegal rentals and those without business licenses who are not collecting the Whitefish Resort Tax or the Lodging Facility Use Tax
- Direct competition for Whitefish lodging properties who are directly employing the local workforce
- Adding a substantial amount of guest rooms which are now filled during the summer season, which was already at capacity.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Private Membership Funding Concerns - Growing concern and member attrition as a result of local anti-tourism, anti-visitor sentiments by Whitefish resident community. There is a real probability our member revenues will decrease significantly throughout FY24. Explore Whitefish is evaluating our current member revenue model.

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

*Briefly describe how your destination aligns with 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. What is the strategic role of your DMO?**

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

Destination Management, Destination Stewardship

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

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



## **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.

## **STRATEGIC ROLE: DESTINATION MANAGEMENT**

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. Our role continues to evolve into stewardship and management, supporting initiatives and campaigns

## **TARGET AUDIENCE & CORE GEOGRAPHIC MARKET**

Explore Whitefish Destination Management and 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 Management and Stewardship efforts also benefit the local community through impactful partnerships and programs to enhance liveability and protect the natural environment of Whitefish.

## **TARGET AUDIENCE: PREFERRED VISITORS**

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.

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.

- 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.

## 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.
- 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.

## **SEASONAL AUDIENCE DETAILS:**

### **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 - LARCH SEASON:**

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 - LARCH SEASON:**

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.

### **Winter Season:**

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 - WINTER SEASON:**

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 - WINTER SEASON:

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.

#### **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, nonmotorized 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.

#### **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.

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

#### **DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP 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](https://SustainableWhitefish.com).

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 and upheld in FY23, Explore Whitefish remained focused on our mission and vision to integrate destination stewardship into the foundation of the organization, using revenues from our lodging and restaurant members from our private 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.

#### **RESEARCH SOURCES:**

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.

#### **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: 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%)

### **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).

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

#### **EMERGING MARKETS: DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP**

Destination Stewardship remains a new focus of our destination. As we move into FY24 Explore Whitefish Sales & Marketing personnel will be looking at expanding our sustainability narrative and storytelling outwardly to grow awareness of our destination to target audience and core geographic markets. Additionally we will be developing strategy to solicit small-scale, luxury groups in our off-seasons. As corporations, incentive groups and tour operators continue to focus on eco-tourism and sustainability we believe there may be group opportunities for Whitefish and our lodging community where our mission and values align with core values of companies and organizations.

#### **EMERGING MARKETS: TOURISM MANAGEMENT & MARKETING**

##### Group Marketing and Management

Meeting and group travel has returned to pre-COVID levels throughout most of the country. Explore Whitefish is working to best assist our member lodging properties in securing future group business. 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 the availability to accommodate larger groups for lodging, meeting venue space and food and beverage offerings.

Explore Whitefish PLANS partners with Glacier Country Regional Tourism on FAM trips and group direct sales and marketing efforts.

##### Specific Target Emerging Market: SKI GROUPS

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

#### **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.*



## **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.

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.

## **DESTINATION MANAGEMENT & 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.

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

### **SUBSET OF DESTINATION MANAGEMENT & 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

Develop target list of eco-focused corporations, incentive and tour operators for direct solicitation and targeted marketing and storytelling

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

## **TACTICS AND PROJECTS:**

## 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. 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

### **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.

#### 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 the limited transportation infrastructure in our region.

#### RESEARCH

It's vital Explore Whitefish better understand trends and forecasting to effectively steward our destination, develop effective tourism management programs, and design off-season marketing campaign that translate to visitation and revenues for our core member base and City of Whitefish. As mentioned earlier we invest in a number of data providers. We are also looking at potential new partners to help us with greater competitive awareness and compliance from our lodging, hotel and short-term rental partners for destination LONG-TERM growth and targeted goal planning.

#### 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%)

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

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## Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
<p>Destination Stewardship: Outreach, Education, Partnership and Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest in programs and project which facilitate sustainable business and community practices</li> <li>2. Build awareness and influence visitor behavior related to recreating responsibly, leave no trace, traveling safely around wildlife and wildfire.</li> <li>3. Build awareness of the importance of the tourism industry on Montana's economy while instilling respect for the industry and those who work in the tourism industry.</li> </ol>	<p>Destination Stewardship: Outreach, Education, Partnership and Support</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Successful completion of Explore Whitefish Sustainability Grant Program FY22 &amp; ongoing efforts for FY23</li> <li>2. Successfully executed "Friend of the Fish" campaign in FY22 and ongoing for FY23</li> <li>3. Success in measuring the mission and work of Voices of Montana, including their local, regional and statewide presentations. Additionally Explore Whitefish for FY24 will develop local member facing public relations campaign to offset current negative attacks on tourism management and promotion for our shoulder seasons/spring, winter and fall.</li> </ol>	TBD	TBD
<p>Destination Stewardship: Product Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify local partnerships for projects with enhance infrastructure for visitors and the local community</li> <li>2. Invest in local infrastructure project which are beneficial to visitors and the local community</li> <li>3. Complete identified projects during the fiscal year</li> </ol>	<p>Destination Stewardship: Product Development</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Projects and partners identified</li> <li>2. Successful allocation of product development funds</li> <li>3. Successful completion of projects</li> </ol>	TBD	TBD
<p>Destination Stewardship: Communications &amp; Sustainability</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 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 safely around wildfire, wildfire mitigation, etc.</li> <li>2. Take the lead on outreach segments of the Sustainable Tourism Management Plan (STMP) to build awareness and influence visitor behavior, with particular focus on peak summer season.</li> <li>3. Encourage use of public transportation (SNOW BUS) and supporting local industry by staying in traditional hotels and lodges.</li> </ol>	<p>Destination Stewardship: Communications &amp; Sustainability</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Use Meltwater to track stories, audiences reach, and advertising value equivalency</li> <li>2. Successful completion and execution of our Friend of the Fish campaign</li> <li>3. Work with STMP Committee and the successful execution of Friend of the Fish campaign</li> </ol>	TBD	TBD

<p>Destination Research:</p> <p>Obtain visitor expenditure and visitation data, social media audience performance, and earned media value which all help evaluate marketing performance, monitor seasonal visitation expenditures and target markets, and help inform future stewardship and marketing strategies. Being new to Explore Whitefish (4 weeks as new Executive Director) need greater awareness of competitive information, forecast and detailed calculator awareness for reporting Whitefish's economic impact by season. What I've seen to date is quite limited. Greater understanding of where Whitefish fits in our market mix is vital! This is an area that needs improvement.</p>	<p>Destination Research:</p> <p>Continue to acquire data through various research platforms such as VisaVue, AirDNA, STR-Smith Travel Research, Sprout Social, Meltwater and ITRR. Additionally only about 30% of our hotels report into STR - we need complete compliance from hotels in sharing data to properly understand ADR/Occupany and demand.</p>	TBD	TBD
<p>Destination Management/Marketing: Paid Media</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve winter visitation by showcasing varied winter experiences in and around Whitefish and Glacier National Park</li> <li>2. Improve "Secret Season" visitation by promoting bicycling, wildlife viewing, birding, fly fishing, golf, water sports, horseback riding, performing arts, culinary experiences, and community events.</li> <li>3. Improve "Larch Season" visitation by promoting fall foliage, wildlife viewing, hiking, biking, golf, fly fishing, bicycling, non-motorized water sports, horseback riding, performing arts, culinary experiences and community events</li> <li>4. Develop a DAM for managing photo library</li> <li>5. Acquire compelling photos for use in paid media campaigns, visitor information, social media channels and website</li> <li>6. Leverage media partnerships for upcoming media campaigns</li> <li>7. Examine and act upon new marketing opportunities which present themselves which are in line with the Explore Whitefish Management &amp; Marketing Strategy.</li> </ol>	<p>Destination Management/Marketing: Paid Media</p> <p>1-3: Metrics for Success include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clicks to book</li> <li>• clicks to reserve</li> <li>• newsletter registration</li> <li>• travel guide digital views</li> <li>• traffic volume from targeted markets</li> <li>• visitor quality measures - bounce rates, length of time spent on site, volume of pages viewed</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Ideally add 30 photos (funding permitting) per quarter</li> <li>5. Acquire 10 professional photos with usage rights for FY24</li> <li>6. Participate in one (1) media partnership for FY24</li> <li>7. Depending on the opportunity, Explore Whitefish measures success in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to the objective measurements outlined in our FY 24 Annual Plan attachment</li> </ol>	TBD	TBD
<p>Destination Management &amp; Stewardship: Social Media</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Integrate destination stewardship messaging into social media narrative</li> <li>2. Spotlight one local member per week on social channels</li> <li>3. Increase combined Facebook and Instagram engagements (likes, comments, clicks) by 10% over FY23</li> <li>4. Develop a LinkedIn profile for Explore Whitefish travel, tour and group growth</li> </ol>	<p>Destination Management &amp; Stewardship: Social Media</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Weekly Social Media Posts</li> <li>2. Weekly Social Media Posts</li> <li>3. Utilize Sprout Social to measure engagement versus FY23</li> <li>4. Develop and utilize LinkedIn as social sales medium</li> </ol>	TBD	TBD
<p>Destination Management: Group Sales and Marketing</p>	<p>Destination Management: Group Sales and Marketing</p>	TBD	TBD

1. Solicit ski groups and incentive travel with emphasis on winter, spring and fall seasons	1. Actively solicit targeted ski groups independently and in tandem with members of Explore Whitefish. Provide support to member organizations to drive group visitation during winter, spring and fall seasons.		
2. Minimally participate in one industry event - trade show			
3. Funding permitting, host 2 FAM trips focused on incentive and winter travel	2. In-person attendance		
4. Support WCVB Member representatives at Spring Ski Shows	3. Explore Whitefish completes and/or partners with member in two (2) FAM events		
5. Timely and immediate response for citywide meetings and conventions, regardless of size. Response required	4. Funds successfully distributed and confirmed participating for spring ski shows		
	5. Completion of all RFP requests		

## ***DMO Budget***

<b>Allowable Methods</b>	<b>Amount Budgeted</b>	<b>% of Budget Allocated</b>	<b>Amount Expended</b>	<b>% of Budget Expended</b>
Administration	\$6,000.00	1.77	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$49,071.00	14.45	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$10,000.00	2.95	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$206,000.00	60.68	\$0.00	0
Product Development	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Research	\$63,000.00	18.56	\$0.00	0
Travel/Trade Shows	\$5,400.00	1.59	\$0.00	0
	\$339,471.00	100.00	\$0.00	

## ***Narrative Evaluation***

Narrative Evaluation to be presented in person June 5-6, 2023.

## ***DMO Plan Attachments***

<b>Description</b>	<b>File Name</b>	<b>File Size</b>
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## ***Reg/CVB Required Documents***

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<b>Description</b>	<b>File Name</b>	<b>File Size</b>
FY24 Certificate of Compliance- SIGNED May 2 2023	FY24 Certificate of Compliance - SIGNED 5.2.23.pdf	903 KB
WCVB Board Minutes - March 13, 2023 FY 2024 Annual Plan Approval	March 13 2023 Minutes SIGNED w Email Vote.pdf	4.2 MB
Whitefish CB Board Minutes Public Budget Approval: March 13, 2023	WCVB 2023 Minutes SIGNED - Budget Approvals.pdf	3.6 MB
Whitefish CVB Bylaws	WCVB Bylaws.pdf	84 KB
Whitefish City Council Meeting Minutes FY 24 Approval: April 3 2023	Whitefish City Council Meeting Minutes FY24 Budget Approval April 3 2023.pdf	101 KB

