



**TOURISM ADVISORY COUNCIL
RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING
VIA ZOOM JANUARY 12, 2026**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Vice-Chair Chris Dunkerson

Shelli Mann

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE STAFF

Jennifer Pelej—Destination MT Division Administrator

INSTITUTE FOR TOURISM AND RECREATION RESEARCH (ITRR) STAFF

Melissa Weddell—Director

Kara Grau—Assistant Director of Economic Analysis

Megan Schultz—Assistant Director of Statewide Recreation and Travel Research

Elena Bigart—Social Scientist and Research Associate

Cartner Bermingham—Social Scientist and Research Associate

Glenna Tawney—Research Project Director and Event Manager

Rachel Shouse—Scientific Communications Director

AGENDA

*All committee meetings and Tourism Advisory Council meetings
are open to the public.*

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2026

11:02 Call to Order, Melissa Weddell

11:05am Melissa Weddell, ITRR Director shared: ITRR received 24 project submissions for the 2026–27 research cycle. Given our limited capacity, we will need to collectively review and prioritize these projects. During the meeting, we will review a short list of projects we believe are most critical based on demonstrated interest, direct requests or inquiries, and our current capacity. Projects not recommended are typically excluded

due to constraints such as limited capacity, lack of expertise, duplication of completed work, or misalignment with our mission.

A recurring theme among submissions is resident travel research. As a reminder, resident travel does not represent new money entering the state and therefore is not included in the nonresident statewide economic impact analysis. While resident travel data is very important for local communities, it does not contribute to statewide economic impact metrics. Additionally, this would replicate a 2018 study (Resident Travel in Montana) and is extremely resource-intensive, requiring year-round monthly resident intercept surveys. Moving forward with a study of this scale would significantly limit our capacity for other projects, likely restricting us to only a few additional efforts.

As a reminder our ongoing annual and recurring work includes:

- Annual visitor counts and statewide economic impact analysis
- Quarterly resident attitude reports (excluding Q3)
- Community grant data collection (pre- and post-resident and visitor surveys)
- Survey kits
- State park visitation counts

Questions and Discussion

Shelli Mann asked which projects, and how many, ITRR plans to pursue.

Proposed: 3 projects

1. Resident study (comprised of approximately five projects; highly intensive)
2. Trail usage in Butte – supports the Butte community and advances innovative research methods that could be applied statewide
3. Understanding adaptive recreation

Shelli expressed full agreement with the proposed approach and emphasized that ITRR are the subject-matter experts. She noted interest in the rail system project, but acknowledged that this year may not be ideal due to stalled federal activity (DC). She recommended keeping it on the list for future consideration, as it benefits the entire state from border to border, and suggested having the study fully scoped and ready for future presentation.

Melissa noted that capacity has been a limiting factor but suggested the team discuss whether someone could attend existing meetings on this topic to gain additional insight.

Next Steps

- Move forward with the proposed project list
- Scope projects and develop budgets
- Share this information ahead of the February TAC meeting

11:24am Adjournment



COMMERCE

Note: Other than the meeting starting time, any time listed is approximate and agenda items may be rearranged. Action may be taken on any item listed on the agenda. Public comment is welcome on all items.