

INVESTING IN EASTERN MONTANA

Building Strong Communities on the Lower Yellowstone



Investing in Eastern Montana

Eastern Montana is blessed with natural resources. Among the most well-known is the Yellowstone River.

According to a new report commissioned by the Lower Yellowstone River Coalition and Business for Montana's Outdoors, investing in improved river access, recreation infrastructure, and wildlife habitat along the river corridor between Hysham and Fairview can attract new businesses, improve quality of life for residents, and encourage visitors to come, stay, and spend money in Eastern Montana's rural communities.

The report forecasts that expanding recreational access by acquiring four public sites along the Lower Yellowstone as proposed by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will **boost visitor spending by \$5.3 million, create a total economic output of \$6.7 million, and support 56 jobs** every year.

Strengthening Our Communities

New public lands and investments in access will benefit Eastern Montana communities by making it easier to enjoy the region's outdoors, encouraging families to stay, helping businesses prosper, and providing a meaningful boost to community health and quality of life.

- 61% of state park visitors in Eastern Montana are residents, and expanding state park access would make it easier for communities and families to visit Eastern Montana's incredible outdoors.
- State parks and fishing access sites provide free recreation and easy access to residents. More time outside will benefit the physical and mental health of our children, families, and communities.
- Parks, public lands, and recreational access strengthen economies by increasing residential property values, attracting new homebuyers and businesses, and encouraging residents to stay and raise their families.

Forsyth mayor Dennis Kopitzke stands by a boat ramp in need of repair at Rosebud Fishing Access Site. (photo by Christian Sawicki)

46%

of overnight visitors to Eastern Montana say rivers like the Lower Yellowstone are one of their reasons for visiting.

“The Yellowstone is our constant connector – it ties our communities together and attracts visitors to Eastern Montana. These folks want to hike, visit historical sites, explore small towns, see a state park, and recreate on the water. If we can provide more opportunities for our

visitors to do these things, they'll stay here longer and spend more money in our local communities.”



Brenda Maas
director of marketing at
Visit Southeast Montana

Vacationers spend more than the typical visitor daily

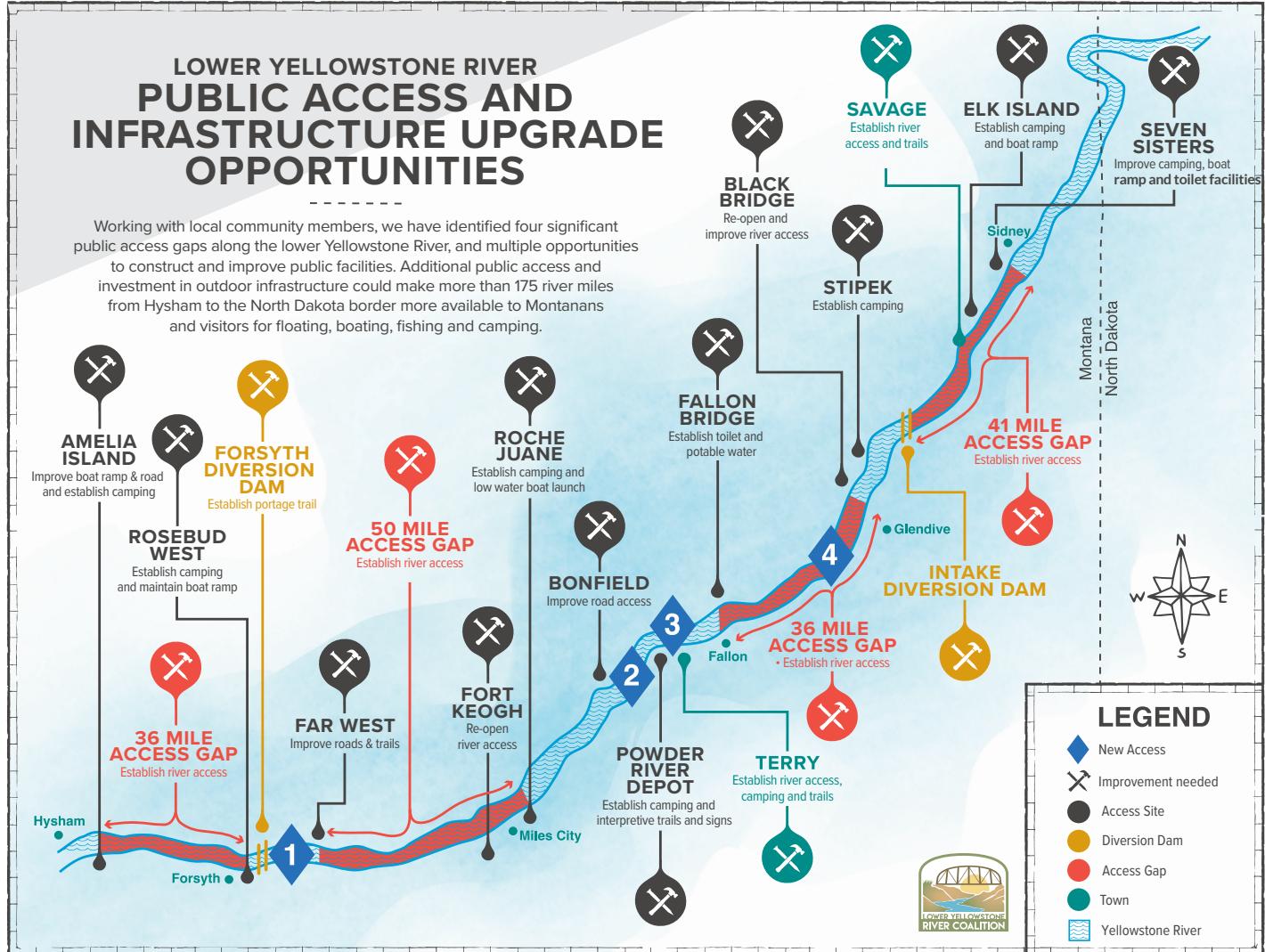
\$237/day vs. \$177

and they stay more than a day longer on average – **6.3 days** compared to 5.2 (2021).



LOWER YELLOWSTONE RIVER PUBLIC ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADE OPPORTUNITIES

Working with local community members, we have identified four significant public access gaps along the lower Yellowstone River, and multiple opportunities to construct and improve public facilities. Additional public access and investment in outdoor infrastructure could make more than 175 river miles from Hysham to the North Dakota border more available to Montanans and visitors for floating, boating, fishing and camping.



New Public Lands For All

With the support of local stakeholders, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks has been working with willing landowners to acquire four new parcels of public land along the Lower Yellowstone corridor.

- 1 **Wildcat Bend (Rosebud County)** will provide walk-in and boat-in access for fishing, hunting, camping and other recreation and protect key wildlife habitat between Forsyth and Miles City.
- 2 **Zero MT (Prairie County)** will secure a long-term easement to increase public access upstream of Terry.

- 3 **Powder River Depot (Prairie County)** will be the first unit of the new Lower Yellowstone River State Park, protect a key fishery, and improve access for residents and visitors
- 4 **Crackerbox Fishing Access Site (Dawson County)** will provide access to a currently inaccessible 36-mile stretch of river between Fallon and Glendive.

Adding these four sites would increase the number of Lower Yellowstone access points between Hysham and Fairview by nearly 20%.



“There’s lots of demand for better access to the Lower Yellowstone – my local access sites, Myers Bridger and Isaac Homestead, were busy with overnight and day users for most of the summer. It’s apparent that we need more access sites to enable all outdoor enthusiasts, whether local or visitors, to enjoy all that the river has to offer.”

Ruth Baue, Treasure County Commissioner and landowner

A Boost for Eastern Montana's Economy

Expanding access along the Lower Yellowstone will spread the economic benefits of visitation along the whole river corridor.

- In 2019, the last year of available data before Covid-19, visitor spending in Southeast Montana contributed to **5,240 jobs and \$157.7 million in employee compensation.**
- That same year, the total contribution of **non-resident spending to Eastern Montana's economy was \$627.7 million.**
- Investing in infrastructure, access, and habitat across these four sites is forecast to **boost visitation by 51,786 visits and visitor spending by \$5.3 million, support 56 jobs**, and produce \$6.7 million in goods and services.



“ Investing in the Lower Yellowstone River is an investment into our future. Over time, careful investments like these will lead to community growth, improved amenities, new infrastructure, better education, and increased disposable income for residents. This project is an opportunity to contribute to a more diversified and resilient rural economy. **”**

Beth Epley

executive director of Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation

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51,786 visits** **boost visitor spending by
\$5.3 million** **support
56 jobs** **create a total economic output of
\$6.7 million**



Hikers exploring Makoshika State Park (photo by Christian Sawicki)

All data provided by RRC Associates. See the complete report at loweryellowstoneriver.com/post/economic-report