

# Trends in River Recreation: Community Role in Stewardship of the Flathead River System

Sheena Pate, Flathead Rivers Alliance, info@flatheadrivers.org

## Abstract

The Flathead Rivers Alliance's River Ambassador and River Recreation Monitoring programs partially funded by Flathead National Forest, National Park Foundation, Whitefish Community Foundation, and Flathead Resource Advisory Committee develops and supports a volunteer stakeholder-based model to address river user trends. Providing the tools and access to knowledge the program fosters an environment of self-teaching and pride in the river and community stewardship while enhancing river data.

## Introduction

Flathead Rivers Alliance's volunteer programs focus on a three-pronged approach of education, stewardship, and community to address river user trends on the 219 miles of Three Forks of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River.

## Program Goal

The goal is to address expansion and increase of usage over the last decade on the Three Forks of the Flathead Wild and Scenic River. Resource management agencies have been increasingly unsupported and challenged to keep up with the increasing threats to the resource that has additional protection under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Program outcomes are assessed in 3 areas:

- 1) Support and enhancement of outstanding remarkable values and water quality.
- 2) Improved access and experience for all users.
- 3) Enhanced river corridor data collection of river usage, wildlife, and invasive species.

## Challenges

Recreation Visits by Month  
Glacier NP

Bookmark this report: [https://irma.dev.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Recreation%20Visitors%20By%20Month%20\(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year\)](https://irma.dev.nps.gov/Stats/SSRSReports/Park%20Specific%20Reports/Recreation%20Visitors%20By%20Month%20(1979%20-%20Last%20Calendar%20Year))

Current year data are preliminary and subject to change. Data will be finalized by the end of the first quarter of next calendar year.

Year	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	Total
2021	23,417	17,238	30,976	53,134	175,277	587,237	796,868	670,628	533,388	149,564	26,300	17,629	3,081,656
2020	13,651	18,020	24,377	0	0	202,701	453,977	459,121	343,911	125,544	29,366	28,196	1,698,864
2019	13,581	11,240	23,989	35,491	167,403	544,088	879,711	771,874	488,909	78,408	20,008	15,137	3,049,839
2018	12,222	11,847	21,758	28,404	195,116	556,304	905,959	667,688	434,600	91,973	20,657	18,781	2,965,309
2017	14,690	13,802	19,336	38,323	177,787	620,962	1,009,665	908,479	389,137	84,469	15,594	13,268	3,305,512
2016	15,674	16,548	21,257	55,125	183,925	485,017	818,481	748,565	482,592	75,797	30,823	12,877	2,946,681
2015	12,087	14,530	18,139	48,270	134,741	414,671	689,064	579,007	351,388	71,297	19,505	13,357	2,366,056
2014	12,111	10,242	13,214	28,667	112,187	334,074	699,650	675,119	353,497	72,694	15,706	11,367	2,338,528
2013	10,836	11,388	15,758	20,922	108,998	343,560	645,514	626,556	355,471	25,965	14,924	10,482	2,190,374
2012	10,318	10,194	12,416	32,085	112,055	313,713	630,093	604,039	356,975	54,127	16,158	9,862	2,162,035
2011	10,887	10,911	12,243	15,747	92,755	266,283	512,494	532,718	320,813	54,356	13,797	10,560	1,853,564



Three Forks of the Flathead River Float Guide, Flathead National Forest, 2018



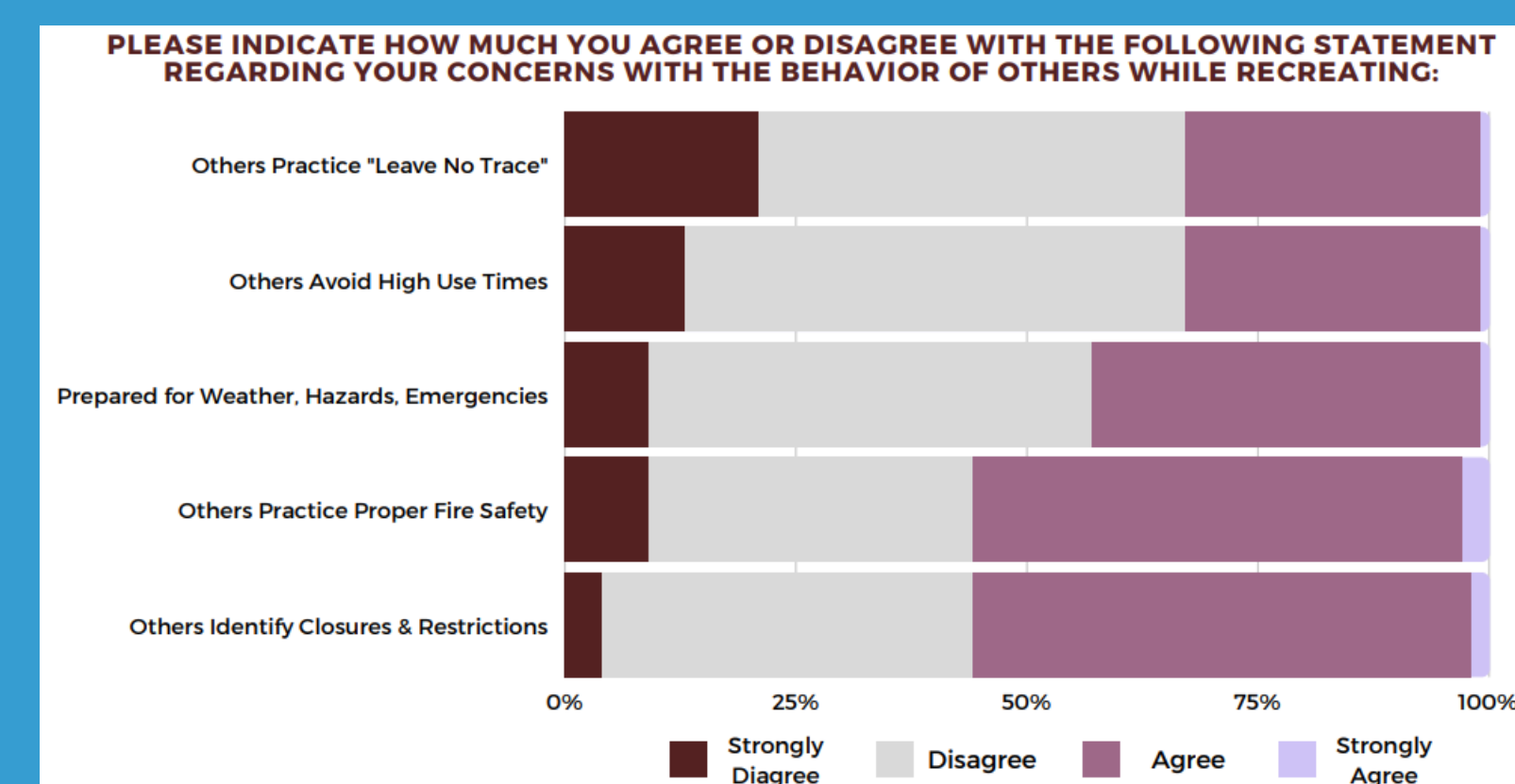
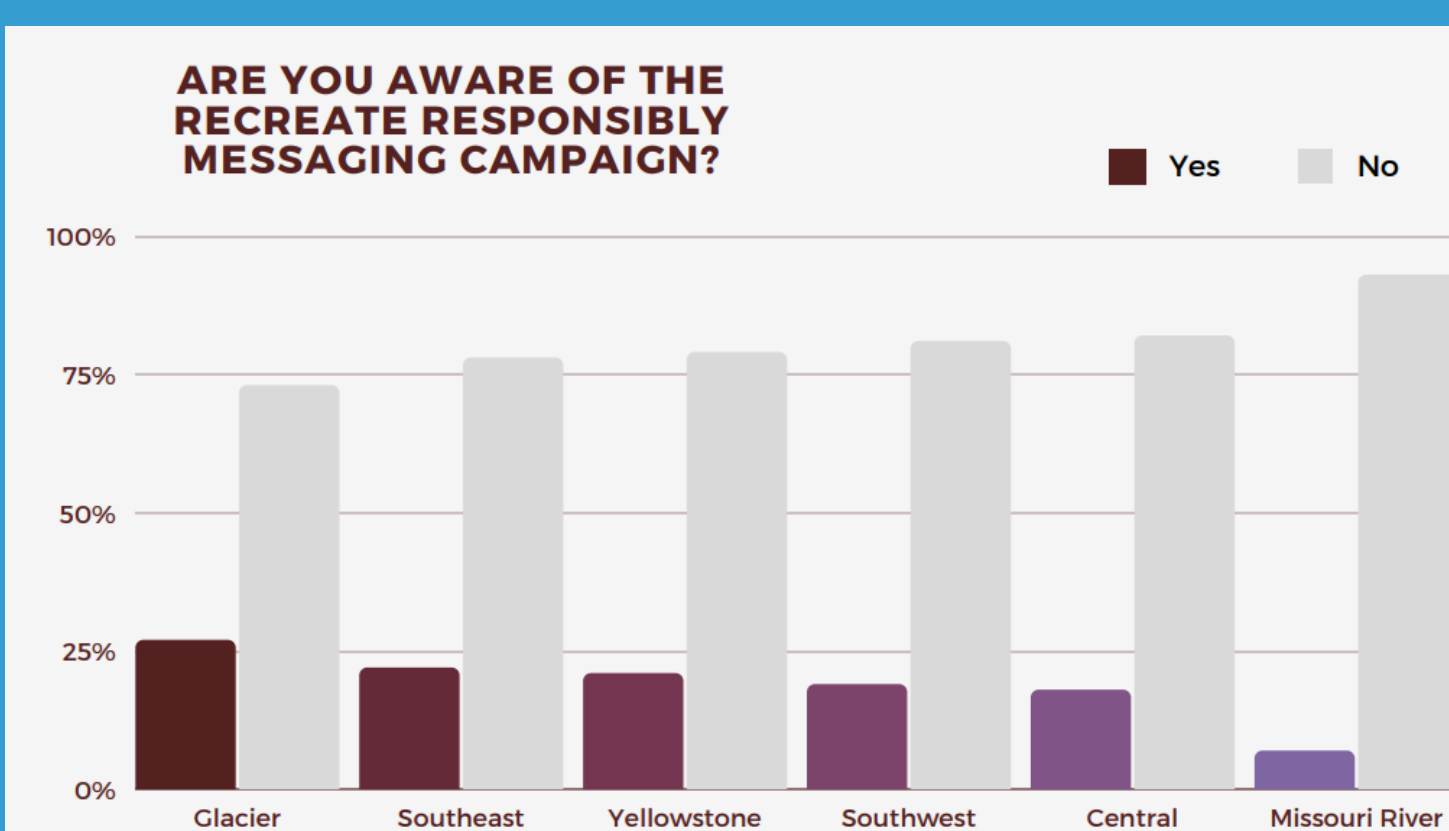
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## Questions

- Can user patterns and impact on resource be influenced by leveraging volunteer stakeholders at river access points?
- Does increased on the ground education and outreach reduce need for agency enforcement resources?
- What data is needed to measure impact on resource's outstanding remarkable values and water quality and user experience?

## Opportunities

- Flathead Rivers Alliance was formed as a solution to enhance capacity of Glacier National Park, Flathead National Forest, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks who cooperatively manage the resource.
- Diverse group of stakeholders foster community stewardship through education and outreach with cohesive and consistent messaging.
- Provide and execute education and outreach effectively and the need for enforcement should decrease.
- Expand piloted 2021 River Ambassador Program at popular river access sites.
- Pilot River Recreation Monitoring Survey 123 Program to expand data collected by River Ranger Patrols.
- Increase public understanding of significance of Wild & Scenic Rivers and range of their Outstanding Remarkable Values.
- Provide additional stewardship events for the public.
- Conversion of users to stewards and advocates.



River Ambassador Program

River Recreation Monitoring Program