

Flathead County



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Flathead County Courthouse by Mike Chilcoat.

Located in Northwest Montana, Flathead County encompasses 3,262,720 acres or 5,098 square miles. Approximately 94% of the land mass is National or State Forest Land, Wilderness, Agricultural, and Corporate Timber Land, thus confining development to the remaining 6% of the area.

A short distance from any developed area is Glacier National Park, with designated hiking areas, two ski resorts, eight golf courses, Flathead Lake, and Hungry Horse Reservoir. With the abundance of recreational opportunities and aesthetic values, it is not hard to see why Flathead County is the among the fastest growing, and the third most populated county in Montana.

There are three incorporated cities in the county. Kalispell, which is the largest, has a population of approximately 25,857, up 29.7% since 2010. Two additional major municipalities include Whitefish, with a population of 8,915, up 40.2%, and Columbia Falls, with a population of 6,464, up 37.8%. There are also several small, full-service communities in Flathead County, which have been designated as Census Designated Places, which will also have population and housing info. Countywide, the population has increased from 74,471 in 2000, to an estimated 90,928 in 2010 to 107,384, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This represents a 18.5% increase in 10 years. Native residents are now greatly outnumbered by

new residents. A large percentage of new residents are retirees and middle-aged professionals.

Attraction development has greatly increased in recent years, contributing to the influx of tourists and tourism-based services, and moving the economic base towards Recreation and Tourism, and creating new jobs in the service industry. Flathead County's population increases by 40% during the months of June through August.

https://flathead.mt.gov/about_flathead_county/index.php

Northwest Backcountry Horsemen Flathead 4-H packing project

The Northwest Backcountry Horsemen Flathead 4-H packing club were recognized nationally in 2021. A story about the successful club was picked up by the Associated Press and was featured in 17 newspapers across the U.S. Currently, the group is vying for the Backcountry Horseman of America Double Diamond award for exceptional educational programs. The 4-H youth involved in this club donated 1520 hours in 2021, valued by the U.S. Forest Service at \$82,979. Their projects included packing trail crews in and out of the wilderness areas, trail clearing, setting up back country outhouses, setting up

wilderness weather stations and trail bridge repair. Their efforts help horse owners and bikers and hikers. In the last three years, the 4-H youth have donated a total of \$188,143 worth of labor to the state and federal forest services and Bob Marshall Wilderness Foundation. If trails are not kept cleared by volunteers, soon the wilderness would become inaccessible to most nature lovers.

It's not all work for this club; a camping trip was enjoyed by the group at Lake Koocanusa in May to set the stage for an exciting summer. Members were charged with planning and conducting the excursion. Leaders assessed their ability to care for and load their livestock before the packing season began. Life skills learned included: leadership, commitment, land stewardship, livestock management, budgeting, and critical decision making.

Flathead 4-H Parade for Veterans

The Flathead County 4-H Ambassadors organized a Veteran's Parade at the Veteran's Home in Columbia Falls to celebrate Memorial Day 2021. Over 100 4-H members and families participated and showed off their red, white, and blue in appreciation for the service of local veterans.

A majority of the veterans had grown up on farms or around animals, so they loved seeing and interacting with all the animals. Everyone went all out: the horses were painted, the lambs wore hats and patriotic butterfly wings, and even Manny, the steer, was wearing home colors. The smaller animals were as popular as the large, as several veterans asked for them specifically. Chickens, rabbits, and guinea pigs were pulled in decorated wagons and some were available to pet. The 4-H members made signs that were a hit. Activities Director Bonnie Compton said, "Kudos to the sign-makers! The signs are all beautiful and now decorate the halls of the (veteran's) home."

"One interaction, in particular, between a young boy and an older veteran, summarized the spirit of the day. The boy, holding a rabbit in a basket, said to the gentleman, 'Thank you for your service.' The gentleman straightened in his wheelchair and said, 'Thank you for being worth the sacrifice.' There was mutual gratitude that day that went way beyond obligation, and I think we were all just glad to be a part of it. While the Ambassadors hosted many events last year, the Veteran's Parade was the favorite," said Jubilee McClean, Ambassador.

The money donated by the clubs allowed each veteran to have chips, soda, and a flag pin. "It's difficult to describe how meaningful the parade and these simple gifts were to the veterans. Many hadn't been outside in 14 months," said Compton. "The response of the veterans was overwhelming. They'd love to do it again next year!"





Previous Page: (top) Flathead 4-H members visit the Veteran's Home on Memorial Day, by Kelly Sue Bain; **(bottom)** Master Gardener Elizabeth Mollica at radio KGEZ, by Charles Mollica; **This Page: (top)** Flathead 4-H packing project members packing their livestock on an overnight camp trip in May 2021, by Patricia McGlynn; **(bottom)** The Western Extension Leadership Development team visits Glacier National Park, by Elizabeth Sparks

Flathead County MSU Extension hosts faculty from across the Western U.S.

The Western Extension Leadership Development program held their annual conference in Kalispell, MT, in September 2021. This four-day conference was a succession of leadership workshops and team building activities. Twenty-four leadership development program interns from the 2021 cohort and eight interns from the 2020 cohort attended from California, Arizona, Idaho, Utah, Hawaii, Alaska, Montana, New Mexico, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Wyoming.

Flathead MSU Extension Agent, Pat McGlynn, arranged mid-afternoon activities that included indigenous team building games at Glacier National Park and a speaker from the GNP Native Speaker program to discuss cultural diversity. The participants played “Run and Scream,” which simulated the choosing of the buffalo runner in the Blackfeet tradition; a hidden rock game that was intended to stimulate intuition; and a stick and ball game that tested dexterity.

Other activities included hiking at Lone Pine State Park and Herron County Park, museum tours at the Conrad Mansion, a guided historic bus tour of Kalispell, and a private Mexican dinner overlooking Flathead Lake. Montana State University’s Dan Clark, of the Local Government Center, gave the capstone address. Workshops included Verbal Judo, Leading through Change, personal assessment reviews, Inclusion and Diversity, and Leadership styles. The interns will meet again in 2022 to showcase innovative projects where they demonstrate leadership growth unique to their individual Extension roles.

Flathead County MSU Extension increases online programs

Considering travel and meeting restrictions in early 2021, Flathead County MSU Extension collaborated with MSU specialists and other agencies to offer increased online programs.

The Master Gardener program, level one and two, was adapted to a web-based platform. MSU Specialist Clain Jones offered an online, six-week soils class attended by a number of Flathead agriculture producers. Agriculture producers also attended the virtual NCAT Soils Conference, Grape Growers Conference, and Berry Grower Association conference. A Land Stewardship eight-week class, that was specially developed to meet the needs of the influx of new residents into the Flathead, has been posted on the MSU Extension and the Flathead Conservation District websites to create easy access to critical information.

Flathead County MSU Extension also made pertinent ag alerts and timely information available on a new Facebook page. Master Gardener Elizabeth Mollica conducts a weekly master gardener program on radio station KGEZ. She answers gardening questions, delivers news from MSU Extension and talks about master gardener volunteer activities.

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Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran's Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.

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