

Flathead County



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Harrison Lake, Flathead County, Glacier National Park, by Maleah McQuade (Flathead 4-H Volunteer Leader).

Due in part to its business-friendly environment and picturesque mountains, rivers, and lakes, Flathead County has continued to attract new businesses, residents, and tourists during the past several years. Specifically, between June 2020 and 2021, Flathead County experienced a 3.5% increase in population with more than 3,500 new residents. This influx exacerbated an already acute affordable housing shortage. Because many new residents work remotely or are retired, these new arrivals failed to provide significant relief for labor challenges experienced by Flathead County's wide range of employers. Flathead County's growing economy includes the following industries: retail, health care, information technology, manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and education. Most of the aforementioned industries, except tourism, have experienced steady, continued growth over the past several years. On the contrary, during the pandemic, primarily domestic tourism to Flathead County and Glacier National Park increased significantly. Still, this demand appears to have peaked during the Summer of 2021 and is moderately decreasing to a more sustainable, albeit higher, level than before the pandemic.

MSU Extension in Flathead County and its associated programs benefit from excellent support from all three county

commissioners and strong working relationships with the county fairgrounds manager and the School District #5 agricultural educators / Future Farmers of America (FFA) advisors. New families moving into Flathead County are most interested in MSU Extension 4-H youth development, gardening, and food preservation programs.

Flathead 4-H Northwest Montana Fair

Hundreds of Flathead County 4-H members participated in a wide range of projects at the 2022 Northwest Montana (NW MT) Fair. Nearly 40% showed a market livestock animal (steer, hog, or sheep) and participated in the showmanship, market, and carcass competitions for their animal's respective species. Flathead 4-H youth participating in the market livestock projects improved their discipline, goal-setting, and record-keeping skills during the rigorous, six-plus month process of raising, training, and showing animals. Also, Flathead 4-H members submitted over 1,500 total entries for the NW MT Fair 4-H horse, dog, goat, small animal, mini-horse, general, and home economics project competitions. The animal-related project competitions at the 2022 NW MT Fair required the

Flathead 4-H youth to display composure under demanding circumstances and commitment to training their animals over the preceding year. The Flathead 4-H level of participation during the 2022 NW MT Fair rebounded after two years of decline in 2020 and 2021.

Wade Willis, a first-year member of the Flathead County Glacier Stars 4-H club competed in the swine (showmanship, market, and carcass) and woodworking projects at the August 2022 Northwest Montana Fair. He commented on his 4-H fair experience, “Everyone is so nice and helpful. This makes me want to be a better person. Now that they have taken time to help me, I want to help everyone too.”

Flathead 4-H Day Camp 2022

After a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic and staffing limitations, MSU Extension in Flathead County coordinated adult volunteer and youth counselor efforts to offer a series of summer day camps at the Darrell E. Fenner Loon Lake 4-H Camp located east of Bigfork. The day camps provided age-appropriate outdoor activities, crafts, and group meals. The campers especially enjoyed the lake swimming, canoeing, log rolling, making parachute cord survival bracelets, singing camp songs, and competing in the camp Olympics. Campers made connections with youth outside their community clubs and were able to experience new, adventurous activities. Camp counselors completed several training sessions focused on planning, logistics, and safety before the beginning of the day camps. These training sessions enabled the counselors to build new relationships and develop leadership styles.

Additionally, the Flathead 4-H Council selected a current youth member to attend a Red Cross lifeguard training course and serve as the primary lifeguard during the day camps. One of the Flathead County Commissioners, the County Administrator, and the Fairgrounds Manager attended the final day’s lunch and watched a portion of the camp Olympics. Flathead 4-H plans to build on the momentum of the successful 2022 summer day camps and offer an overnight camp experience in July 2023.



Top: Flathead County 4-H members, by Melanie Hayek;
Bottom: Flathead 4-H Campers and Counselors at the Darrell E. Fenner Loon Lake 4-H Camp in Ferndale, by Melanie Hayek

Flathead County Staff

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