Flathead County at a glance

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 timberland. With Glacier National Park, the Bob Marshall Wilderness area and millions of acres of mountains and forest lands a short distance from any developed area in the county, there are thousands of miles of hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and riding trails for year-round outdoor exploration. Two ski resorts, eight golf courses, Flathead Lake, and the Hungry Horse Reservoir exemplify several of the world-class attractions that have helped to make Flathead County one of the fastest-growing, and the third most populous county in Montana.

There are three incorporated cities in the county. Kalispell, which is the largest, has a population of approximately 22,052. Two additional major municipalities include Whitefish, with a population of 7,073, and Columbia Falls, with a population of 5,241. Countywide, the population has increased 22.1% from 74,471 in 2000, to an estimated 90,928 in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Native residents are now greatly outnumbered by new residents. A large percentage of new residents are retirees and middle-aged professionals attracted to higher income jobs and lifestyle.

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. The health care industry has also seen considerable growth in the past 25 years, and is now the largest industry in the county, employing over 6,300 people. Growth in retail shopping opportunities has also made Kalispell a regional shopping center.

The MSU Extension office in Flathead County works closely with county commissioners as well as county departments to provide quality services in education and development throughout the area. Collaborating with local and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, regional and national partners, MSU Extension staff and faculty in Flathead County continue to provide cutting edge and relevant educational outreach through a commitment to the emerging needs of their community.

(sources: Flathead County Government; Kalispell Chamber of Commerce)
Extension Programs Benefit the Public in a Variety of Ways

Flathead County MSU Extension offers residents educational opportunities

Dr. Emily Glunk, forage Extension specialist at Montana State University, demonstrated best management practices for maintaining superior pastures for livestock production. The workshop was hosted by a Flathead County horse owner in their pasture and attended by over 30 residents. Attendees learned how to identify grasses and weeds, how to use a measuring stick to know when to move animals on and off a pasture, and how to design fences that maximize forage use. Evaluations demonstrated that attendees learned information that they would put to use immediately to remedy problems on their own land.

A beginner beekeeping workshop was offered to residents wanting to learn how to start a hobby beehive. Speakers from Western Bee, the Montana Department of Agriculture and the University of Montana Master Beekeeping program presented an all-day class on a number of topics ranging from bee biology, to a year in the hive, how to assemble a beehive and how to diagnose diseases in the colony. Over 50 people attended this February workshop. This was the second workshop in the series and with over 150 people total participating, the risk of disease spreading to commercial apiaries is greatly reduced.

Montana State University Extension Flathead County agent Pat McGlynn, along with master gardeners, answered gardening questions at the third annual “Free the Seeds” event at the Flathead Valley Community College. Over 1,600 participants attended workshops, swapped seeds and gathered information from the master gardeners. The attendees felt more comfortable saving seed, transplanting, selecting varieties and testing for germination rates after the event.

McGlynn continued to teach about proper pasture management at a yak camp in May and at a back country horsemen meeting in April. McGlynn taught basic plant physiology to schoolteachers at Cayuse Prairie and Bigfork Middle School. McGlynn gave a research update at the Annual Flathead Cherry Grower meeting and the Annual Montana Grape and Winery Association meetings in April. Acting as a guide at the annual Forestry Expo in Columbia Falls, McGlynn taught tree identification to area fifth graders.

Photos by Pat McGlynn
Flathead 4-H Provides Leadership Opportunities for Youth

Strategies that prepare youth for living in a global and ever-changing world are central to the 4-H “learn-by-doing” model. Leadership programs for 4-H members in Flathead County provide opportunities for youth to learn and practice skills that contribute to a future of success. Essential competencies of leadership such as self-confidence, decision-making, interpersonal skills, sense of community, and entrepreneurialism were introduced to over 1000 4-H youth members through educational outreach programs in Flathead County.

One highlight of the programs offered by MSU Extension Flathead County takes place at Loon Lake, located just east of Bigfork. Summer camp has attracted 4-Her’s from Flathead County for multiple generations. Twenty-four camp counselors completed eight hours of training and preparation to host 72 youth ages 8-12 for one week of summer camp. Counselors learned the stages of youth development and to successfully engage the campers they would be supervising. Conflict resolution, mediation skills, and the experiential learning model were also central to the counselor training curriculum. The design and implementation of the weekly program was done collaboratively by the counselors, 4-H Extension agent, and camp manager. An adventurous, social, and creative program upheld the time-honored tradition of youth mentoring and the passing-down of knowledge at summer camp.

In 2017, County Congress provided a stage from which 44 Flathead County 4-H members took part in a community tradition that allows youth to share their enthusiasm for 4-H projects and compete against one another in a constructive learning environment. In a range of events, including career communications, demonstrations, and livestock judging, youth put to the test skills they have developed at the club level such as public speaking, presenting oneself, and defending a position. Flathead County 4-H was honored in 2017 to have two youth representatives qualify at State 4-H Congress with their ‘how-to’ on public speaking demonstration, and then attend National 4-H Congress in Atlanta, Georgia.

Flathead 4-H members also took part in an interstate exchange, presented at local livestock training seminars, and represented their county as 4-H Ambassadors at area events. Every month at 23 4-H Club meetings across Flathead County, youth members work with experienced and committed leaders on the skills that will help to “make the best, better” for themselves, their clubs, community and world.

Loon Lake, Darrell Fenner 4-H Camp. Photo courtesy of Ben Frentsos
HORTICULTURE RESEARCH TOUR IN FLATHEAD COUNTY

Flathead County MSU Extension hosted a group of Montana Extension agents in August 2017. Montana State University Extension agent Pat McGlynn, in collaboration with Toby Day and Brent Sarchet, co-directors of the Montana Heritage Orchard project, led a horticulture research tour across the county. The agents toured sweet cherry variety trials on Flathead Lake, hops research in Whitefish, small, dark fruit research hosted by Flathead Community College, and learned about efforts to control invasive aquatic species at the University of Montana Biological Station in Yellow Bay.

Extension agents tour the MSU hops research trial in Whitefish. Photo by Pat McGlynn

Centennial Celebration in Flathead County 4-H

The 4-H program has been a cornerstone of youth development in northwest Montana for 100 years. Throughout 2017, 4-H youth, volunteer leaders, and alumni shared the storied traditions of this historic program in Flathead County. The Flathead 4-H Foundation, the fundraising body of Flathead 4-H, helped publish a series of monthly newspaper articles about 12 local families with historic ties to area 4-H programs. Some of these families have proudly worn the 4-H Clover for five consecutive generations. During the 2017 Northwest Montana Fair, 4-H alumni and fairgoers were treated to a birthday cake and the opportunity to explore images and artifacts from 4-H

LEFT TO RIGHT: Centennial Celebration Display; 4-H at 2017 Fair Parade in Kalispell; Adopt-a-Road Sign donated by Flathead County. Photos courtesy of Ben Frentsos
clubs of yesteryear as part of an interactive display. Flathead 4-H was also represented by several clubs in the 2017 Northwest Montana Fair Parade in downtown Kalispell and was chosen to be the Grand Marshall of the parade.

Celebrating the centennial year was an opportunity to bring awareness of 4-H as a youth development program and to attract support for future programming opportunities for local youth. Cookbooks containing prized family recipes from Flathead Valley families were sold as part of a fundraising drive to support scholarships and activities for 4-H youth. The Flathead 4-H Foundation is also selling “Centennial” bricks for the new entryway at the Northwest Montana Fairgrounds in Kalispell, where the names of generous supporters of Flathead County 4-H will be inscribed in stone. The centennial year will also be remembered for a historic achievement of 4-H & FFA market livestock members, who at the 2017 Market Livestock Sale at the Northwest Montana Fair brought in a record-breaking $530,000.

As part of the 100-year celebration, 4-H clubs in Flathead County continued their tradition of giving back to their community by cleaning 114.5 miles, 14.5 more than their goal, of local roads and attracting recognition from the Flathead County Roads and Bridges department for their contribution. Additionally, over $1,500 was raised by the Flathead 4-H Foundation at a family fun day to support Montana families who suffered losses due to wildfires in 2017. Flathead County 4-H is committed to being a sustaining partner in developing our community by recognizing the traditions that have made our program strong and introducing innovative programs to build for the future.

**Master Gardeners**

Flathead County MSU Extension Master Gardeners formed a CORE group in 2017 to organize and plan activities and workshops for continuing education. The master gardeners learned about new varieties of hardy plants at Bibler Garden, volunteered at local community and school gardens, participated in a cider press and conducted an apple variety taste test at a Kalispell orchard. By continuing to increase their horticulture knowledge, master gardeners are able to provide even greater service to Flathead county residents and agencies. Master Gardener classes continue to be a high-demand educational opportunity for residents.
Montana State University Extension is an ADA/EO/AA Veteran’s Preference Employer and provider of educational outreach.