MONTANA HERITAGE Commission

We preserve our HISTORY for our FUTURE

2021 - 2022 | Biennial Report

This report is required per MCA 22-3-1003 (12)

Our Mission

The Montana Heritage Commission preserves and promotes Montana's Territorial Capital history and resources through quality visitor experiences and preservation of state-owned buildings and artifacts.

MONTANA HERITAGE
Commission

Background and History

In 1997, the **Montana Legislature purchased Virginia City and Nevada City** from the Senator Charles Bovey family for $6.5 million.

In 2000, **Reeder's Alley was gifted to the state** by Darrell and Kathy Guston.

Front of Content Corner (Montana's Territorial Capital-Legislative Offices in 1865)

Today, we insure our properties and artifacts for $47.98 million.

The Montana Heritage Commission takes pride in managing some of the most valuable and fascinating historic sites in Montana – **Virginia City** and **Nevada City**, plus **Reeder's Alley** and the **Pioneer Cabin** in Helena. Our goal is to preserve and promote these sites while encouraging Montanans to become excited about the rich history of this great state. Virginia City was the site of our territorial capital from 1864 – 1875.

MHC offices now occupy Montana's Territorial Capitol Building in Virginia City.

Current photo of Montana's Territorial Capital-Legislative Offices

Strategic Highlights

"We preserve our HISTORY, for our FUTURE."

MHC operating budget FY 2023:

$2,270,000 approved budget (expenses)
÷ $74.6 million (economic footprint)
= 3,286% Return on Investment

Investing in history pays for Montana!

$74.6M

$74.6 million economic footprint in Montana

1226 JOBS

Contributes to 1,226 jobs in Montana

276 PROPERTIES

Has stewardship over 276 heritage properties from the 1860s to 1875 time period.

1M VISITORS

Montana's #1 State-owned tourist destination with over one million visitors to Virginia and Nevada City from Memorial Day to Labor day each year.

Reeder's Alley is one of the few original structures from Helena's territorial time period

1.2M ARTIFACTS

Over one million Americana artifacts from the 1860s to 1960 time period.

Strategic Priorities

The Montana Heritage Commission has the following four strategic priorities:

(1) **PRESERVE**: Establish a more effective system to ensure proper allocation of resources, preservation and maintenance prioritization, and cataloging of historic buildings and artifacts.

(2) **PROMOTE:** Expand marketing and promotional efforts to strengthen image and identity of the historic resources managed by The Montana Heritage Commission.

(3) **PARTNER**: Broaden local, state, and federal support and understanding of the important contribution heritage makes to Montana's economy, cultural identity and sense of historic community.

(4) **PROTECT**: Implement programs to enhance inventory to be compliant with insurance guidelines, fire suppression services and safe practices for our tourists to avoid injury and exposure to litigation.

Goals and Objectives

- Continue being Montana's number one state-owned tourist destination by increasing lodging facilities and marketing to weddings, socials gatherings, family reunion, school tours and music festivals.

- Implement approved preservation and maintenance projects based on available funding from revenue generated from tourism, earned revenue from concessionaires and funding from the Montana Legislature and Governor's Office.

- Promote at key locations that have demonstrated higher traffic referrals, such as National Parks and visitor centers; expand our collection of tourism data through e-commerce, Google Analytics and results-oriented marketing venues.

- Engage and educate state, local and non-profit partners to increase a sustainable funding resource for the long-term stabilization of state-owned resources and continue to enhance the visitor experience under our stewardship.

- Improve and increase educational outreach programs, internships and interpretation programs to enhance the visitor experience and understanding of our history.

- Seek all available funding support through grants, donations and legislative appropriations to further our preservation of state-owned buildings and resources; and increase our economic footprint, job creation, and business development.

- Recruit and utilize volunteers/interns to give educational opportunities and to increase efficiency of operations with limited state funding.

- Improve ways in PastPerfect software to streamline inventory artifacts that can be more visible and transparent to the public.

- Continue to educate and implement best practices from other historic and tourism sites on financials, marketing and enhancement of visitor experiences.

- Protect tourists and state-owned assets and by partnering with town fire departments, first responders and local county sherriff's departments.

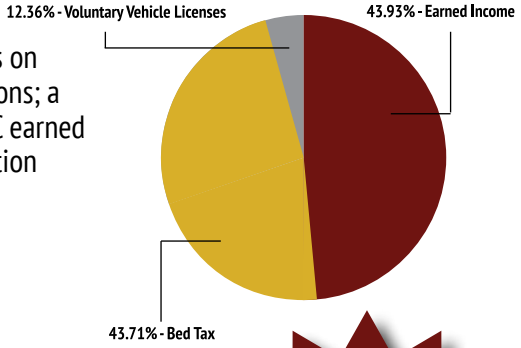
http://montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov/

MHC Annual Operating Income

Financials

HOW ARE WE FUNDED?

INCOME:
The Montana Heritage Commission operates on tourist-related income from bed tax allocations; a voluntary vehicle license plate fee; and MHC earned revenue generated from MHC property vacation rentals, hotels, and museum entrance fees.



FY 2022 Income Summary:

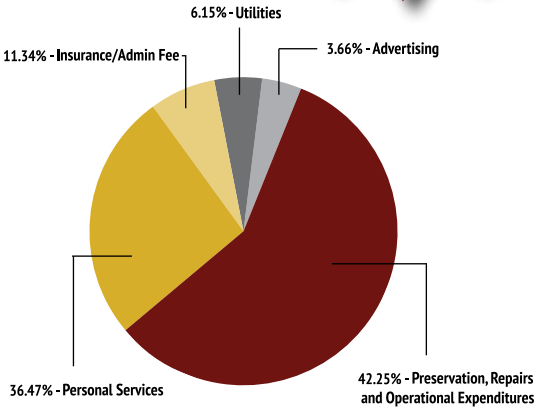
Total Revenue/Allocation – $2,287,612

- $1,004,886 – MHC Earned Income
- $1,000,000 – Bed Tax Allocation
- $282,726 – Voluntary Vehicle License Fees

Appropriations from legislature have been allocated in the past but are not an annual appropriation.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?

EXPENSES: MHC Operations
MHC operations in Virginia City, Nevada City, and Reeder's Alley operating costs include all personal services, preservation, promotion, repairs, maintenance, insurance and administrative fees.



FY 2022 Total Operations Summary:

Total – $1,453,540

- $614,085 – Preservation, Repairs, & Operational Expenditures
- $530,078 – Personal Services
  (5 Full-Time, 15 Seasonal Employees)
- $164,889 – Insurance/Admin Fee*
- $89,358 – Utilities
- $53,130 – Advertising

*** Administrative Fee to Department of Commerce is 14.78% of Personal Services (2022-2023 FY)**
(2025 Biennium will be 13.47%)

Preserve

Collections and Archaeology

"Virginia City has one of the largest Americana artifact collections in the United States."
– New York Times - July 21, 2002

Our current Americana artifact inventory count is 1,317,281.

We preserve, stabilize and track collections using museum practices and standards for historic sites. We catalog the objects; establish a written and electronic record; and research the objects and their significance to Virginia City and Nevada City and the rest of the collection. We educate the public through research and exhibition of these historic objects.

View our artifact collection online at:
www.virginiacitymt.com

Gypsy Verbal Fortune Teller

U.S. Cartridge Box Plate as found in the Bonanza Inn

U.S. Cartridge Box Plate

Preserve and Partner

Virginia City Information Center and Village Pump

All earned revenue goes to non-profits that are in alignment with the Montana Heritage Commission strategic plan.

Current Day

The Montana Heritage Commission restored this 1944 gas station and made it into a functioning gas station and information center.

In FY 2023, we were able to award the following grants through earned revenue:

$15,000 Historic Street Lights (Town of Virginia City)
$18,500 Virginia City Fire Department
$15,000 Virginia City Chamber of Commerce
$1,500 Friend of the Thompson Hickman Library
$1,500 Elks Lodge of Virginia City
$1,500 Virginia City Preservation Alliance

Stay in Montana's History

The Montana Heritage Commission's top priority was updating our accommodations so tourists and Montanans can come "Stay in Montana's History." Over the past few years, we have upgraded facilities to have 64 available rooms in state-owned properties to accommodate weddings, social gatherings and family reunions.

Alder Gulch Accommodations

AlderGulchAccommodations.com

The Fairweather Inn added 17 bathrooms along with a fire suppression system and furniture upgrades.

The Nevada City Cabins and Nevada City Hotel received updated bathrooms and furniture.

Stay in Montana's History

Heritage Accommodations

heritageaccommodations.com

Dr. Daems and Corbitt Residences were updated as vacation rentals.

The Bonanza Inn bathrooms were remodeled, including electrical and plumbing upgrades, as well as new furniture in the rooms.

Harding Residence was updated as a vacation rental.

Governor Thomas Francis Meagher Cabin was updated as a vacation rental.

Discovery-Ellingsen Park

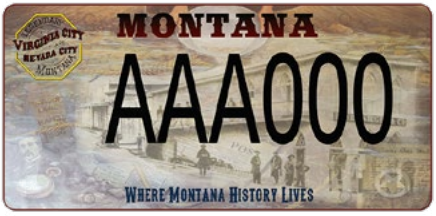
In 2019-2020 the Montana Heritage Commission completed Discovery-Ellingson Park, which is dedicated to the men who discovered Virginia City and the man who dedicated his life to preserving it.

This park was designed for social gatherings, music festivals and weddings. All revenue generated goes into future preservation projects in Virginia and Nevada City.

Promote

The Montana Heritage Commission's marketing campaign is diverse and encompasses social media and e-commerce, print, TV, radio and affordable packages, such as the Vigilante Stay and Play pass. Through collaborate efforts with the Town of Virginia City and business owners, **Virginia and Nevada City are Montana's number one state-owned tourist destination with over one million tourists visiting each year.**

"We advertise around our popular national parks in Zion, Yellowstone, Glacier and Yosemite, making Virginia and Nevada City a must-see stop between the Parks."



Preservation for Seasonal Housing

The Montana Heritage Commission completed much-needed seasonal housing upgrades with two new bath houses, and maintenance on 34 units located at Daylight Village. These units help provide housing for the many businesses that operate during Memorial Day to Labor Day each year. The majority of this funding came from HB 652.

Promote

Business Development

The Montana Heritage Commission has business relationships with over 35 private businesses that rent from state-owned buildings.

Montana businesses keep our historic buildings standing!

Promote

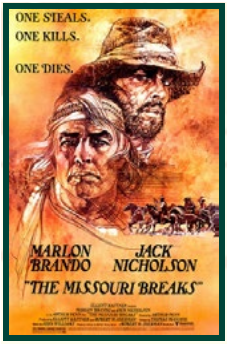
Vigilante Family Pass

This pass is good for a family or group of five people for two days and includes:

- Train rides on the Alder Gulch Short Line RR
- Gold panning at the River of Gold
- Entrance into the Living History Museum

The Montana Heritage Commission has developed the Vigilante Family Pass so Montana families and tourists can experience our history in an affordable way for $125."

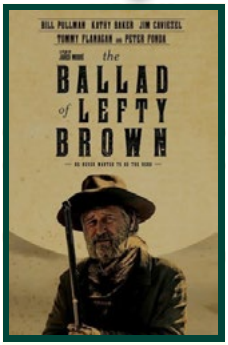
Films Shot in VC/NC

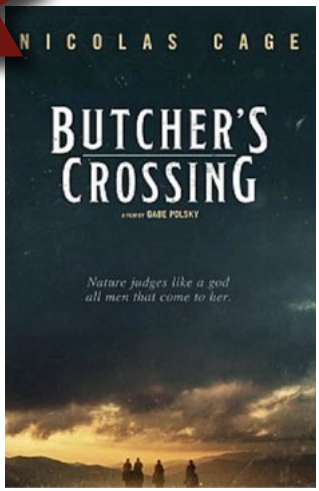


- Little Big Man - 1970
- Missouri Breaks -1975
- Thousand Pieces of Gold - 1989
- Unsolved Mysteries, "Plummer's Gold" - 1989
- Return to Lonesome Dove - 1993
- The Patriot - 1997
- History's Mysteries: The Vigilantes - 1999
- Bob Viva's Restore America - 1999
- Ligia - 2001
- Enemy of the People - 2001

- Frontier House - 2001
- A Moment of Peace - 2002
- Taking Chance - 2009
- History Channel Ghost Stories Series - 2009
- American Experience Series, "Custer's Last Stand" - 2011
- La Route Du Western - 2011
- Absaroka: Sins - 2013
- Any Bullet Will Do - 2015
- Jack Slade - 2015
- BBC Production, "Mountains" - 2016
- Ride by Night - 2016
- Ballad of Lefty Brown - 2017
- C.M. Russell and the American West - 2017
- Discovery Channel - Expedition Uknown - 2018
- Butcher's Crossing - 2021

Virginia City wins Film Friendly Community of the Year





Famous English Photographer David Yarrow and Animals of Montana

Photography shoots in Virginia City and Nevada City Montana.
Featured below are Cindy Crawford, "America's Supermodel;" Olivia Culpo, "Miss Universe;" and Kate Bock, "Sports Illustrated Model of the Year."

A portion of proceeds from David Yarrow's book went to preservation of buildings located in Virginia City and Nevada City.

Education Outreach and Living History Interpretation

The Montana Heritage Commission Living History program helps tourists understand what it was like to live in the 1860s through interactive interpretive experiences.

MHC offers a diverse range of educational programs and reaches out to Montana schools K-12. School groups from across Montana visit Reeder's Alley and enjoy guided tours in Virginia City and Nevada City.

Approximately 5,000 Montana students come each year for school tours.

The Chicago Times has ranked the Montana Heritage Commission Living History program in Virginia and Nevada City #4 in the nation as a 'Top Living History Destination.'

Protect

The Montana Heritage Commission is active in protecting the state's heritage and resources through insurance programs and is a strong supporter of the local fire departments.

The Montana Heritage Commision upgraded the Nevada City fire pump that services fire protection of restaurants, hotels, cabins and museums located on state property.

It remains a top priority to have fire suppression services in all restaurants, vacation rentals and hotels.

The MHC purchased the state a fire truck to be on site at the Nevada City Museum, hotels, and cabins.

In FY 2022 the Montana Heritage Commission matched fundraising efforts for the Fire Department giving a total $12,500.

MHC pays $59,022 annually to insure (Risk Management) its building structures and artifacts. The estimated value of state-owned resources in 2022 was $47.98 million.

Partner

The Montana Heritage Commission (MHC) is a small state agency. Partnerships are critical for us to leverage funding and staff resources, as well as helping us gather expertise and skills to achieve our goals.

Some of the partners we have worked with recently include:

- AmeriCorps (NCCC)
- Ancient Order of the Hibernians (Butte/Helena)
- Butte Silver Bow Public Archives
- Elderhostel (Dillon)
- Friends of the Cumbes Toltec Railroad
- Madison County
- Mai Wah Society
- Montana Conservation Corps
- Montana Historical Society
- Montana History Foundation
- Montana Preservation Alliance
- Montana State University - Project Archeology
- MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- MT Ghost Town Society
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Ruby Valley Conservation District
- Town of Virginia City
- Trout Unlimited
- University of Montana
- US Forest Service
- Virginia City Area Chamber of Commerce
- Virginia City Preservation Alliance
- Volunteers for the MT Heritage Commission
- Washington State University
- Youth Challenge (Dillon)

MHC Commissioners and Staff

Patricia Spencer – Business Woman
PO Box 1202
Helena, MT 59624

Susan Hardman – Member at Large
500 Lovers Lane
Hamilton, MT 59847

Virginia Court – Member at Large
18 Heatherwood Lane
Billings, MT 59102

Charity Fechter – Member at Large
PO Box 1246
Ennis, MT 59729

Philip Maechling – Community Planning
579 W County Line Rd
Florence, MT 59833

Bill Howell, Vice Chair – Tourism Bsns
PO Box 337
West Yellowstone, MT 59758

Scott Osterman – Director of Commerce
PO Box 200501
Helena, MT 59620-0501

Marilyn Ross, Chair – Historic Preservation
PO Box 298
Twin Bridges, MT 59754

Molly Kruckenberg, Director
MT Historical Society
225 N. Roberts
Helena, MT 50601

Dr. Timothy Lehman – Historian
312 Alderson Avenue
Billings, MT 59101

Jeffrey Ewelt – Tourism Advisory Council
2100 S. Shiloh Road
Billings, MT 59106

Paul T Snyder – Appointment by the Speaker of the House
1628 38th Street South
Great Falls, MT 59405

David Hoffman – Appointment by the President of the Senate
5780 Vulk Drive
Helena, MT 59602

MHC Staff:

Executive Director
Elijah Allen

Collections/Curators
Marge Antolik & Kate Steeley

Preservation Specialists
Jeff Cleverly & Donny Steeley

Tourism Event Coordinator
Becky Digiovanna

Education Outreach Living History
Creative Edu Ventures - Leona Stredwick

Honorary Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

Saving Montana's Territorial Capital Building

Visit savemontanashistory.com to see top preservation projects and donate.

In May of 2022, the State acquired Montana's oldest standing territorial building, known as Stonewall Hall. We had an honorary ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate raising over one million dollars through private donations to help stabilize and preserve this important piece of history.

This donation came from the Lefever family.

2022

Governor Greg Gianforte

Circa: 1860s

This report is required per MCA 22-3-1003 (12)

Virginia City may have been the largest placer gold strike in the United States and helped fund the Union Army.

Virginia City was Montana's Territorial Capital from 1864 to 1875.

Virginia City started the Montana Vigilantes movement. 3-7-77

Virginia City/Nevada City is considered to be one of the largest historic sites in the United States.

Reeder's Alley is one of the few original structures from Helena's territorial time period.

Sources: American Alliance of Museums, Rocky Mountain Economic Improvement District & Circa Analytics

montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov | virginiacity.com | reedersalley.com

LEGENDARY VIRGINIA CITY AND NEVADA CITY MONTANA

Reeder's Alleys

$74.6 million economic footprint in Montana

Contributes to 1,226 jobs in Montana

Has stewardship over 276 heritage properties from the 1860s to 1875 time period

Over 1 million Americana artifacts from the 1860 to 1960 time period

Montana's #1 state-owned tourist destination with over 1 million tourists visiting from Memorial Day to Labor Day each year.

$74.6M

1226 JOBS

276 PROPERTIES

1.2M ARTIFACTS

1M VISITORS

Reference: The Rocky Mountain Economic Improvement District

Montana Heritage Commission
P.O. Box 338 | Virginia City, MT 59755 | montanaheritagecommission.mt.gov