



## Grant Details

### 118486 - FY23 DMO Plan

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122501 - FY23 Central Montana DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

**Grant Title:** FY23 Central Montana DMO Plan  
**Grant Number:** 23-51-035  
**Grant Status:** Underway  
**Comments:**  
**Applicant Organization:** Central Montana  
**Grantee Contact:** James Cooler  
**Award Year:** FY23  
**Program Area:** DOC Office of Tourism

**Amounts:**  
**Contract Dates:**

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed
06/15/2022	07/01/2022	06/30/2023
<small>Proposal Date</small>	<small>Project Start</small>	<small>Project End</small>

**Grant Administrator:** Barb Sanem  
**Contract Number:** 23-51-035  
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 06/30/2023

Project Start    Project End

**Comments**  
**Amendment Comments**

## **DMO Plan Narrative**

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### **1. Describe Your Destination**

*Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.*

Central Montana is comprised of 13 counties in the heart of Montana. Conveniently located between Glacier National Park to the north and Yellowstone National Park to the south, Central Montana offers visitors a refreshingly authentic Montana experience.

From the small-town atmosphere and western way of life to the history, wildlife, outdoor recreation, art and adventure that Montana is known for, Central Montana's laid-back lifestyle gives visitors the opportunity to get to know Montana up close and personal.

Central Montana's wide-open spaces, rivers and streams, island mountain ranges, and expansive big skies are the perfect backdrop for visitors to experience a Montana with fewer crowds. Whether taking a river trip through the breathtaking beauty of the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River, a guided horseback ride into the Bob Marshall Wilderness, or simply spending the day wildlife viewing, birding, fishing or hiking on the many secluded fields, trails and streams throughout the region.

Off the beaten path, Central Montana's charming small towns dot the landscape, giving travelers ample opportunity to meander and explore as they travel through the region. Rich with unique shopping, historic downtowns, distinctive museums, and gracious people, our small towns embody the genuine Montana travelers are often looking for.

Where a rugged past meets a vibrant present, visitors can see the landscapes and absorb the sense of place that inspired renowned western artist Charlie Russell. They can walk in the footsteps of Lewis and Clark, explore the diverse cultures of local tribal communities, visit ghost towns and gold mines or travel the dinosaur trail, all within reach of comfort and hospitality.

One-of-a-kind events are plentiful throughout the year, giving visitors a wide variety of art events, rodeos, fairs and music festivals that can be found most weekends between March and October. Winter brings Christmas strolls, snow events and holiday celebrations.

Central Montana's diverse natural landscape, abundant wildlife, rich history and distinctive small towns ensure that Central Montana will be an authentic western experience unlike any other.

#### **Strengths:**

- Historical experiences – Central Montana is the perfect vacation destination for history buffs. Steeped in history, there are experiences to be had around every corner. The Lewis and Clark trail winds its way through Central Montana with the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center being the icing on the cake. The C.M. Russell Museum is another jewel in the crown of Central Montana, along with numerous other museums throughout the 13 counties.
- Charming small towns with unique experiences.
- Quaint golf courses in almost every community within Central Montana lends itself to a golfing experience that highlights amazing backdrops.

- Gateway communities to the east slope of the Rocky Mountain front, including the Bob Marshall Wilderness, offer adventures and a truly Montana Western experience.
- Scenic Byways: Kings Hill Scenic Byway and the Missouri Breaks Backcountry Byway offer visitors a chance to get off the beaten path. They are the perfect experience to promote to our motorcycle enthusiasts.
- Plenty of birding opportunities are detailed in the Central Montana Birding Brochure.
- Unique signature events, such as Red Ants Pants Music Festival, Montana Chokecherry Festival, Whoop UP Days, Western Art Week and numerous other small-town celebrations and art shows.
- One-of-a-kind attractions, like Havre Beneath the Streets and the Charlie Russell Chew Choo.
- Spectacular geology and paleontology with six sites along the Montana Dinosaur Trail.
- Authentic Montana lifestyle is highlighted on the region's farms, ranches, guest ranches, Native American cultures, along with Mainstreet Montana.
- Inclusion in the Eastern Montana Initiative of two of Central Montana's counties and one reservation has helped to identify and elevate tourism potential in those areas. The research generated by the prior EMI campaign is valuable in more closely targeting travelers who enter Central Montana on the eastern side.
- Centrally located between Glacier National Park and Yellowstone National Park.
- Fun organized trails – Pie a la Road, Brewery Trail and the Barn Quilt Trail.
- Excellent variety of fish and wildlife that are perfect to highlight for wildlife viewing, fishing and hunting.

### **Opportunities:**

While many locations in Montana are facing overcrowding and extremely high prices, Central Montana still has plenty of room to explore without crowds. The cost of lodging is still affordable, especially for families that might be on a budget. While reservations are recommended, many activities within Central Montana do not require reservations or are not full and can still accept more visitors. Central Montana is set up to accept more of the visitors that want the Montana experience and take pressure off the locations that are overcrowded.

### **Challenges:**

- Shortage of labor causes limited hours, long wait times and subpar services for many businesses in the service industry.
- The increased cost of gasoline.
- Limited and expensive airfare.
- Conventions have begun to return but haven't reached prior benchmarks.
- The lack of restaurants, lodging, attractions and gas stations in our small communities.
- The lack of a large winter resort destination makes marketing the winter months challenging.

## **2. Align with Montana Brand**

***Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.***

***More spectacular, unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48***

Central Montana has thousands of acres of public land (short grass prairie, river, mountains, lakes and forests), in addition to farm and ranch land.

***Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to natural wonders***

Central Montana is comprised primarily of small charming towns located in close proximity to our unspoiled nature and is anchored by the larger town of Great Falls.

***Breathtaking experiences by day, relaxing hospitality at night***

Central Montana's breathtaking experiences are many – from viewing spectacular art to seeing the locations that inspired the art. Our hospitality is as varied as sleeping in a beautifully restored historic hotel, to a river guide pitching a tent along the wild and scenic river or a guest ranch wrangler leading guests on a trail. Local musicians entertain at night with the cocktails named after the nearby geography.

**3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?**

***Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).***

Destination Marketing

**Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.**

***3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).***

Using the results from Destination Analysts, Visa Destination, inquiries for travel planners and information generated through the Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research we are defining our geographic area as the following states: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming and the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan.

**Target Demographics:**

Leisure Travelers: Adults 35 years old and older with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children in the summer months. They participate in shopping, visit historic sites and museums and enjoy outdoor activities.

Travelers visiting family and/or friends: Adults 35 years old and older with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. They are in the area to attend a specific event or visit with family and friends. They will be looking to do activities in the area, such as outdoor recreation, enjoy nightlife, breweries and dining. They are also likely to visit museums or other attractions.

Active Travelers: Adults 35-65 years old with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. These are the types of travelers that are most likely to enjoy outdoor activities, such as biking, hiking, fishing, wildlife viewing, skiing and snowmobiling. They are likely to enjoy the nightlife, breweries, and check out unique dining opportunities.

Cultural Travelers: Adults 35-65 years old with a household income of \$75,000+ that may or may not be traveling with children. They seek cultural experiences and enjoy everything cultural a place has to offer, such as museums, galleries and historical sites. They want to learn everything about the place they visit.

### **Target Psychographics:**

The psychographic characteristics of Central Montana's target market include those who value local businesses and locally grown or produced items, enjoy scenic landscapes and value access to public lands, waterways and open space.

### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?**

Central Montana utilizes the following research to support our DMO strategy:

1. ITRR to refine target audiences.
2. Destinationanalysts.com – travel outlook, insights and updates.
3. Arrivalist (Eastern Montana Initiative)
4. Visa Destination insight into who is visiting the area and what they are purchasing.
5. CentralMontana.com website analytics to measure the success of tactics used. The website also provides data on users and where the users are located.
6. Meta for Business to optimize campaigns and match/find our target audience.
7. Google Analytics provides insight into audiences.
8. Once the research is reviewed, Central Montana's media plan will have specific KPIs to measure the success of individual placements. Many options on the plan will drive traffic to Central Montana's website where views of landing pages, time spent on the site and specific requests will be tracked to measure success. Growth in social channels and expanding our e-newsletter list will allow the region to reach and engage that audience and stay top-of-mind with more frequent information about planning a visit to the region
9. Central Montana also relies on our agency partner to make recommendations that fit our targeting based on their research resources such as Nielsen Ratings and Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings, CEB Iconoculture Consumer Insights, Scarborough Research, SWAD broadcast CPP forecasting, ComScore and Quantcast. These tools provide access to radio and TV ratings, print circulation numbers, web usage stats, core forecasting information, consumer

psychographics and media usage trends. These resources help The Wendt Agency create highly targeted and cost-effective media strategies.

### **3c. What are your emerging markets?**

Astro-tourism: In collaboration with Southeast Montana and Missouri River Country we are preparing to launch Trail to the Stars. A website designed to highlight places to view the night sky within our area. Montana's Trail to the Star spans the eastern region of Montana and will ultimately include more than 50 locations, all ideal for stargazing.

Agri-Tourism: Many within our target market are looking for safe, family vacations that return them to an unhurried, more grounded experience. Highlighting rural events, lifestyles and products produced on our region's farms and ranches will increase visitor awareness and can ultimately provide supplemental income for agricultural and ranching operations.

### **4. Define and describe your overall goals.**

*A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.*

Goal 1: Raise awareness of Central Montana as a destination as an authentic Montana experience.

Goal 2: Build partnerships with Grown in Montana and Made in Montana to increase our Agri-Tourism.

Goal 3: Officially launch Trail to the Stars.

#### **4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.**

Goal 1 Tactics: While many tourist locations within Montana are experiencing overcrowding we still have plenty of space and room for tourists to experience an authentic Montana. We will pull in our defined and outlined strengths to highlight with strategic messaging within our campaigns and also by creating more content that tells the story of Central Montana.

Goal 2 Tactics: Working to build upon the emerging market of Agri-Tourism in Central Montana we will continue to find ways to work with Grown in Montana and Made in Montana to increase our Agri-Tourism. There is a great opportunity to work closely with rural communities to promote and enhance our Agri-Tourism offerings.

Goal 3 Tactics: Create a marketing program centered around Trail to the Stars and leverage our partnership with Southeast Montana and Missouri River Country. Strategically market the Trail to the Stars through a digital campaign.

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## Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation

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Objectives	Measurable Metrics for Success	Report the Metric Achieved	Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success
Launch Trail to the Stars.	Create a landing page on Central Montana's website that promotes Trail to the Stars.	Yes, this page was launched October 2022.	This page was created and activated on October 2022.
Increase awareness of Central Montana as a Montana destination. -	Increase overnight stays in Central Montana 3% over FY22.	In FY23, Central Montana saw a 9% increase in overnight stays in Central Montana over FY22.	Central Montana was very successful with this objective. Our Paid Media efforts met or exceeded all benchmark efforts, which we feel was a great driver of success in the increase in overnight stays we saw in FY23.  As a region, we were particularly excited to see that Central Montana exceeded \$3,000,000 in Lodging Tax Collections overall.
Increase our Instagram followers.	Increase our Instagram followers 20% over the followers we had in FY22.	Central Montana had a 9.3% increase in our Instagram followers.	While Central Montana did not achieve a successful metric, it should be noted that we were transitioning organic social media away from our agency on record and into the hands of the Executive Director halfway through the fiscal year.  Given that the Director was new to the organization, it would be fair to say that some of our momentum was lost during this transition period. One of our goals moving forward is to re-align our organic social media with our paid media efforts and draft a schedule for the quarter ahead of us.

			A 20% increase in growth was an aggressive growth metric, but we did manage to achieve a strong metric.
Grow our email newsletter readership.	Add an additional 10,000 email addresses to our list over what we had at the end of FY22. Sending out a strategic newsletter highlighting the strengths of Central Montana 8-10 times a year.	Unfortunately, Central Montana didn't make this metric. With a growth of 5,700, we achieved a little over 50% of the goal.	Given that we have missed this goal, we are taking a number of steps to continue to improve upon the size of our newsletter email list. Currently we are rebuilding our website, and one of the main goals was to make it much more inviting to sign up for our newsletter. Along with this, we will be creating an automatic response email to those who do sign up to make sure they are thanked right away, and directed towards our travel planner and accommodations listings. We did send out a total of 8 newsletters in FY23, which allowed us to accomplish that metric.
Build strong partnerships to highlight Agri-Tourism.	Create a landing page on Central Montana's website to highlight Agri-Tourism.	This metric was successful and can be seen at: <a href="https://centralmontana.com/agritourism/">https://centralmontana.com/agritourism/</a> .	<i>Agritourism is a market that Central Montana plans to steadily develop over the next 5 years. Our landing page(<a href="https://centralmontana.com/agritourism/">https://centralmontana.com/agritourism/</a>) has given us a great start out of the gate.</i>

## DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$93,101.00	13.82	\$79,872.94	87.0
Agency Services	\$51,189.00	7.6	\$31,507.24	62.0
Cooperative Marketing	\$10,145.00	1.51	\$8,378.14	82.58
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Education/Outreach	\$2,000.00	0.3	\$1,494.00	74.7
Joint Venture	\$10,666.00	1.58	\$10,666.00	100.0
Marketing Resources	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Opportunity Marketing	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$352,532.00	52.33	\$355,050.87	100.71



Marketing Personnel	\$10,000.00	1.48	\$8,654.00	86.54
Research	\$26,000.00	3.86	\$17,655.56	67.91
Travel/Trade Shows	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$77,000.00	11.43	\$58,492.05	75.96
Website Development (Online, Website, Mobile)	\$41,011.00	6.09	\$41,011.41	100.0
	\$673,644.00	100.00	\$612,782.21	

## ***Narrative Evaluation***

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With FY23 being a year for Central Montana to bring on a new Executive Director in August of 2022, it was a year of transition and responsiveness for our organization. With this in mind, there was a lot to dig into and get up to speed on. While doing so, we also were able to either achieve or make solid progress towards our marketing goals.

With our marketing goals in mind, the theme was to increase our communications and messaging channel, while expanding upon our emerging markets.

With astrotourism being one of our emerging markets, we set an objective to create a landing page that promotes Trails to the Stars, which can be seen at <https://centralmontana.com/stargazing>. This page was launched in October of 2022 and received 11,272 pageviews and an average time on page of 01:48 for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Our second objective was to embrace agritourism as our other emerging market. This was accomplished by creating a landing page for that highlights agritourism within the Central Montana Region and can be seen at <https://centralmontana.com/agritourism>. This landing page went live in June of 2022 and received 3,672 page views and an average time on page of 01:50 for the remainder of the fiscal year.

In an effort to increase our communication channels through our organic social media, we set an objective to increase our Instagram followers by 20%. Unfortunately, CMT did not achieve this metric, but did achieve a 9% increase for a total of 15,296 Instagram followers at the end of the fiscal year. While a 20% increase in growth was an aggressive metric, we feel that we can still view a 9% growth as a strong accomplishment. It should be noted that traditionally, the Executive Director for Central Montana handled the organization's organic media. However, given the nature of how fast social media continues to evolve and change, we will be considering to allow our marketing agency on record to take over our organic social media so that we can create a stronger alignment between our organic and paid social media.

A second way we strove to increase our communication channels was to add an additional 10,000 email addresses to our email list for our monthly newsletter. With a growth of 5,700 subscribers, we accomplished just under 60% of our goal for the fiscal year. Given that we have missed this goal, we are taking steps to continually add subscribers to our email list by making it more inviting to subscribe to our newsletter on our website. Additionally, we will be adding an auto response email thanking new subscribers and directing them to other marketing assets such as our annual travel planner and our social media platforms that they can follow.

Our last objective was to raise more awareness of Central Montana as a Montana destination by achieving a 3% increase in overnight stays over FY22. We are happy to report that we saw a 9% increase in overnight stays for the fiscal year. We attribute a large amount of this success due to our paid media efforts meeting or exceeding all relative

benchmark metrics. As a region, we were particularly excited to see that Central Montana surpassed \$3,000,000.00 in Lodging Tax Collections for the first time within a fiscal year.

Looking forward, Central Montana completed a strategic planning process in October of 2023, and is working hard to implement initial recommendations. This will give us a 5-year vision on how to best grow the region not only as a destination marketing organization, but also a destination development, management and stewardship organization as will. While there will be challenges ahead as we grow and evolve, we feel that we are ready to align ourselves in a way that is best for all aspects of tourism within the region.

### ***Reg/CVB Required Documents***

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<b>Description</b>	<b>File Name</b>	<b>File Size</b>
Current by-laws	Central Montana Tourism Bylaws - 2022.pdf	88 KB
Certificate of Compliance	Certificate of Compliance - Executed.pdf	436 KB
Copy of Motion approving the DMO plan passed by the Board of Directors	Minutes Special Board Meeting April 2022.pdf	164 KB

