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, 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 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 19,927; and two additional major municipalities include Whitefish, with a population of 6,357, and Columbia Falls, with a population of 4,688. There are also several, small, full-service communities in Flathead County. Countywide, the population has increased from 74,471 in 2000, to an estimated 90,928 in 2010, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. This represents a 22.1% 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

Land Stewardship

The 2020 Land Stewardship class was developed to address needs of the increasing number of small acreage landowners moving into Flathead County. This eight-week class was taught by MSU Extension, a local farmer, staff from the Montana Department of Natural Resources, Flathead County Conservation District, Flathead County Weed Department, Montana Department of Agriculture, and other experts. The 2021 landowner class will be delivered virtually. The 25 attendees in 2020 own over 1,200 acres in Flathead County and rated the class a 4.8/5. A participant commented

“Wonderful homeowner information. So fabulous to hear about the resources in the valley and landowner assistance programs.”
Master Gardener

The 2020 Master Gardener class was Flathead County MSU Extension’s first foray in virtual teaching. Eleven students took the eight-week class on topics such as lawns, vegetables, soil science, plant physiology, fruit trees, perennials, irrigation, and propagation. Because it was online, the class reached students who lived over an hour away, an immune-compromised person and a mother with childcare challenges. Future programs will include virtual adaptation so more residents can access Extension resources. The students missed face to face meetings. In October, a pizza in the park evening proved extremely successful outdoors. Students shared community service experiences and photos about collecting data on berry research, tending the Bigfork school garden, helping in city parks and more.

Virtual innovation

Flathead County MSU Extension started a new Facebook page to stay connected to the community. The SNAP-ED educator demonstrated healthy meal preparation and the agriculture agent posted gardening, wildlife, and pasture management information. The Facebook page will continue to be an avenue to reach the public for class announcements and educational resources.

To maintain guidelines for social distancing, Flathead County MSU Extension provided drive-through testing for the Private Pesticide Applicator licensing program. Applicants remained in their vehicles in the parking lot while the test was proctored by the Extension agent. Several producers were able to take the test at the same time, increasing efficiency.

Gardening in the Flathead

The four-week ‘Gardening in the Flathead’ class was attended by 30 county residents and held at the Flathead Valley Community College. MSU Extension and local green industry leaders collaborated to teach homeowners about garden design, soil fertility, seed selection, irrigation systems, weed control and proper fencing systems. Students gave the class high marks for its simple and practical applications. This class was developed for individuals who requested basic gardening information without the community service aspect of the Master Gardener course.
Sailing, by Nori Pearce

Previous Page: (top) Tulips by Nori Pearce; (center) Kalispell by Patricia McGlynn; (bottom) Master gardener logo; This Page: Sailing, by Nori Pearce
Flathead County Staff

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

Patricia McGlynn
Agriculture and Natural Resources and Community Development Agent

Dee Cooper
Administrative Assistant