

Montana National Forests

The Montana national forests contain:

- 2,278 miles of groomed winter trails
 - 2,061 miles of groomed trails open to snowmobiles
 - 217 miles of groomed trails closed to snowmobiles
- See Table A.

The Montana national forests contain:

- 17,550,000 acres of land
 - 11,921,820 acres of land open to snowmobiles
 - 1,608,456 acres of non-wilderness land closed to snowmobiles
 - 4,009,795 acres of designated wilderness land, also closed to snowmobiles
- See Table C.

The NVUM surveys for the Montana forests show there are an estimated:

- 370,957 cross-country ski and snowshoe visits annually
 - 393,508 snowmobile visits annually
- See Table B.

These numbers show that on national forest land in Montana, there are almost 10 times more miles of groomed motorized trails than non-motorized while the number of snowmobile and skier visits are almost equal. This disparity results in a density of 1,709 cross-country skier and snowshoer visits per non-motorized mile versus 191 snowmobile visits per motorized mile.

The Bitterroot National Forest has no groomed trails designated non-motorized even though there are an estimated 11,000 annual skier and snowshoer visits on that forest.

In the Flathead National Forest, cross-country skier and snow-

shoer visits outnumber snowmobile visits by a margin of 14 to one, yet only one-third of all the groomed trails are non-motorized. This disparity translates to a density of 3,015 skier and snowshoer visits per groomed non-motorized mile compared to 90 snowmobile visits per groomed motorized mile.

The Gallatin National Forest receives slightly more than twice as many snowmobile visits as skier visits, yet it has almost 14 times more miles of groomed motorized trails than groomed non-motorized trail.

Of the 492 miles of groomed trails in the Lolo National Forest, only 18 miles are non-motorized, despite an estimated 17,000 annual cross-country visits. The Helena National Forest has 276 miles groomed for snowmobiles and just 10 miles for skiers.

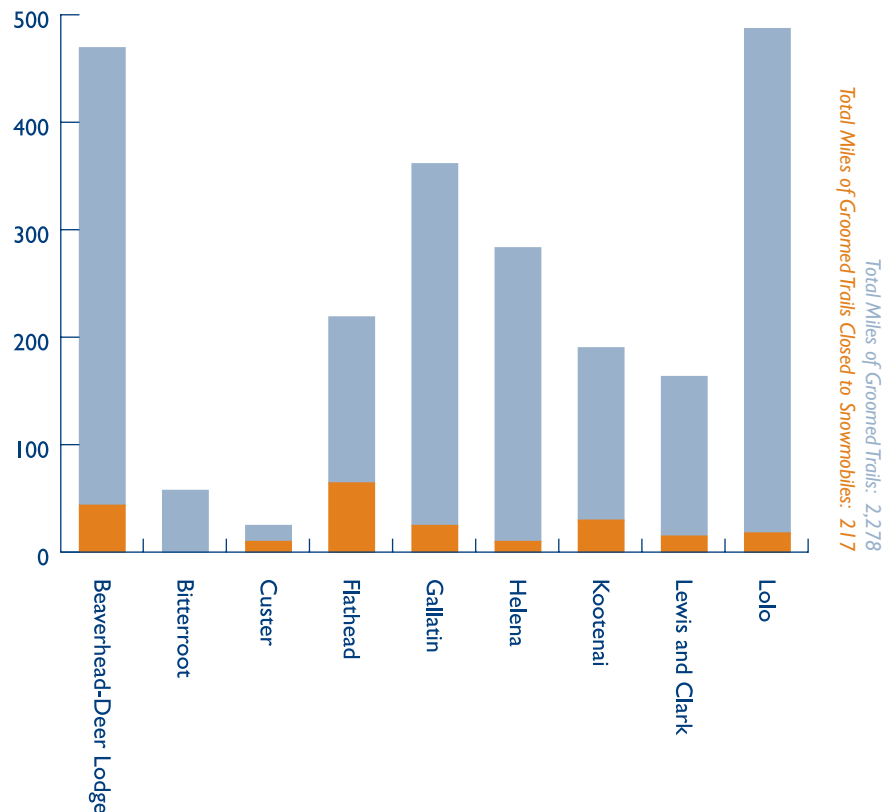
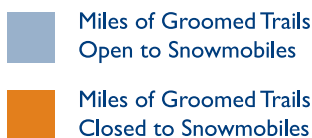
As for skiers per acre, the Flathead National Forest has 17 times more skier visits per non-motorized acre than snowmobile visits per motorized acre. For practical purposes, when wilderness acres are taken out, there are 23 times more skier and snowshoer visits per non-motorized acre than snowmobile visits per motorized acre.

The situation is likely more severe for skiers and snowshoers than the NVUM survey represents since the Helena and Gallatin National Forests did not include snowshoeing as a choice in their NVUM survey and since the NVUM does not account for the impact of a scarcity of non-motorized trails on user numbers.

A survey of more than 4,000 Montanans about their primary recreation activity, conducted by the Montana Department of Health and Human Services, showed that six percent of the respondents participated in cross-country skiing and eight percent

Table A: Total Miles of Groomed Winter Trails on National Forest Land Open and Closed to Snowmobiles

See Appendix 3, pg. 38, for comparison of snowmobiles vs. skiers/snowshoers per mile of motorized and non-motorized trails.



participated in snowmobiling.⁸⁷ Snowshoeing and backcountry skiing were not included as choices. The same respondents were asked how often they participated in their sport and the answers showed that the cross-country skiers went 9.5 times per month versus the snowmobilers at 2.8 times a month. Of note, fifty percent more respondents cited cross-country skiing than snowmobiling as the having “greatest need of additional facilities or sites” in their county.⁸⁸

The University of Montana Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research (ITRR) conducted a survey of more than 2,600 Montana resident households which revealed participation rates of seven percent for snowmobiling, five percent for cross-country skiing, and two percent for snowshoeing. The study showed non-resident participation at six percent for snowmobiling, four percent for cross-country skiing, and three percent for snowshoeing.⁸⁹

Table B: National Forest Annual Visits per Activity

Source: U.S. Government, National Visitor Use Monitoring data

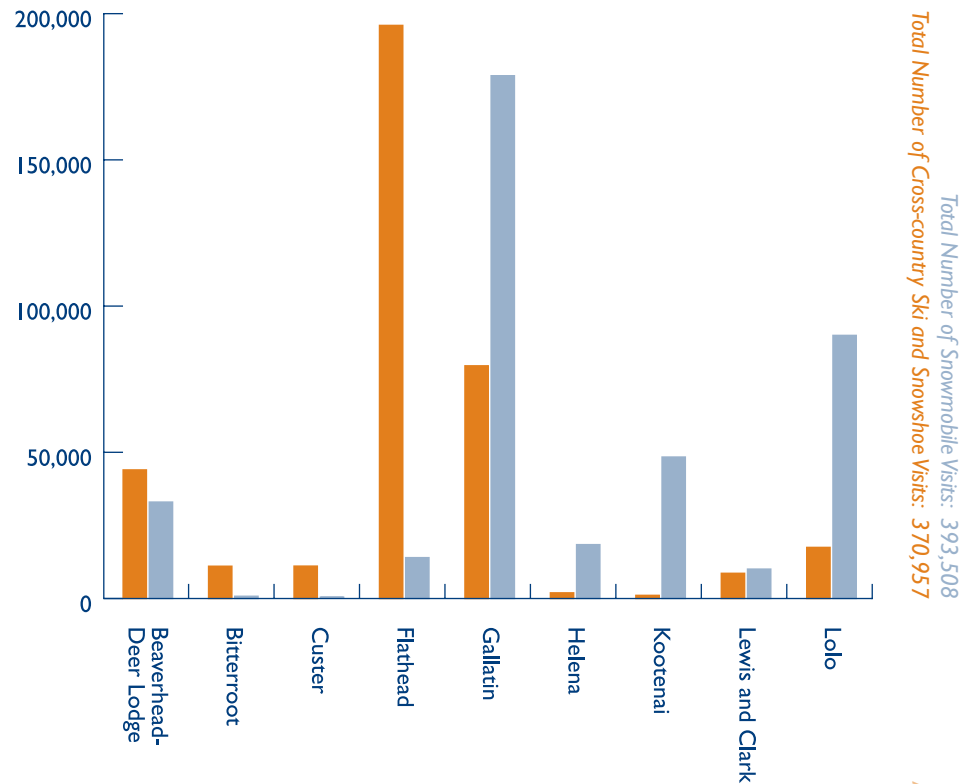


Table C: National Forest Acres Open and Closed to Snowmobiles

