



# Determination of Need for a Prerelease Center in the Flathead Region

As required by the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARMs 20.7.502-503, see Attachment A), the Montana Department of Corrections (MDOC) has determined there is a need for a prerelease center in the Flathead Region of Montana. This document serves as the required written rationale supporting that need and documentation of the availability of services for offenders.

## Documentation of Need:

MDOC currently contracts with nonprofit organizations to operate prerelease centers in Billings, Butte, Bozeman, Great Falls, Helena, and Missoula. The Flathead Region, comprised of Flathead, Lake, Lincoln, and Sanders Counties, does not currently contain a prerelease center.

## State and Regional Population:

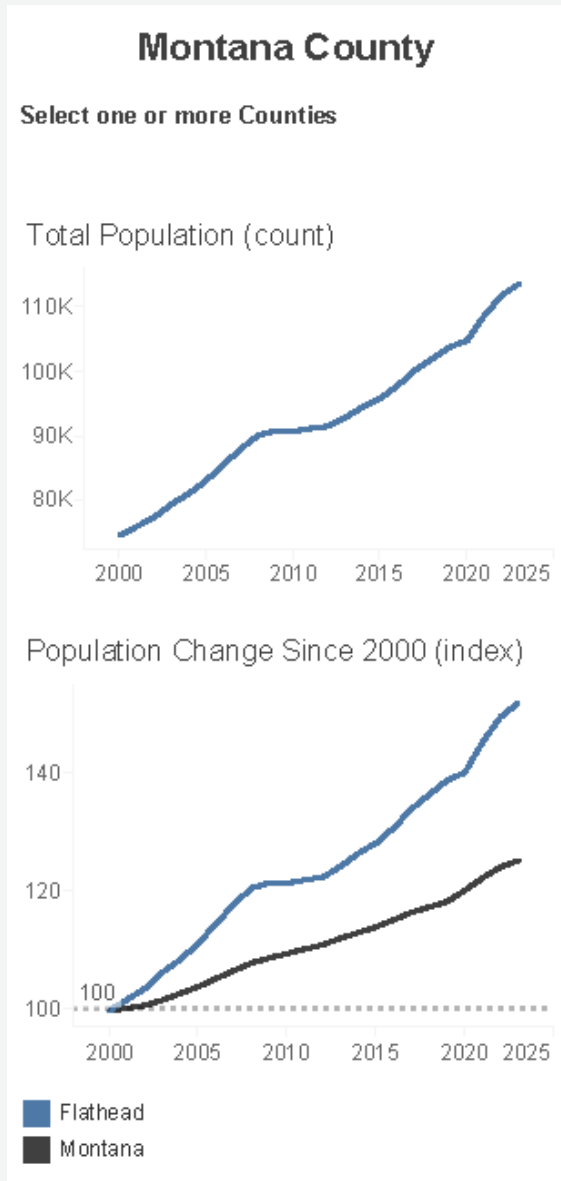
Statewide [population information](#) reported by the Montana Department of Commerce, including the most recent (2023) ranking of counties by population, was reviewed.

It shows that the counties supporting existing prerelease centers are all contained in the top ten for population in Montana. The Flathead Region contains three additional counties included in the top 10 for population—Flathead at #4, Lake at #9, and Lincoln at #10.

		County
Rank of Current Year Total Population		
1	Yellowstone	170,843
2	Gallatin	126,409
3	Missoula	121,849
4	Flathead	113,679
5	Cascade	84,900
6	Lewis and Clark	75,011
7	Ravalli	47,738
8	Silver Bow	36,360
9	Lake	33,338
10	Lincoln	21,895
11	Park	17,903
12	Hill	16,276
13	Sanders	13,684

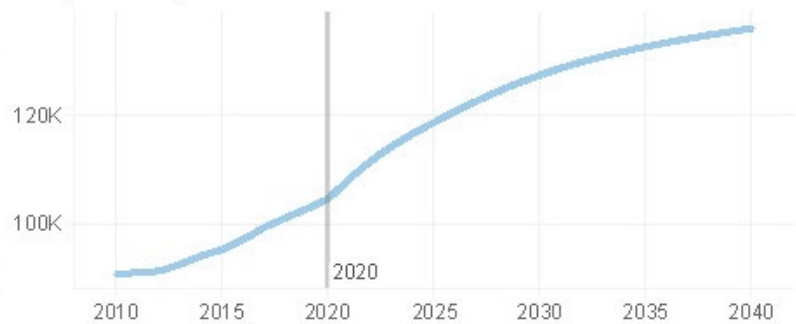


Flathead County has, since 2000, experienced a [consistently higher rate of population growth](#) than the state of Montana overall.



Additionally, [based on data from the Department of Commerce](#), Flathead County is projected to see a continued increase in population over the next 20 years.

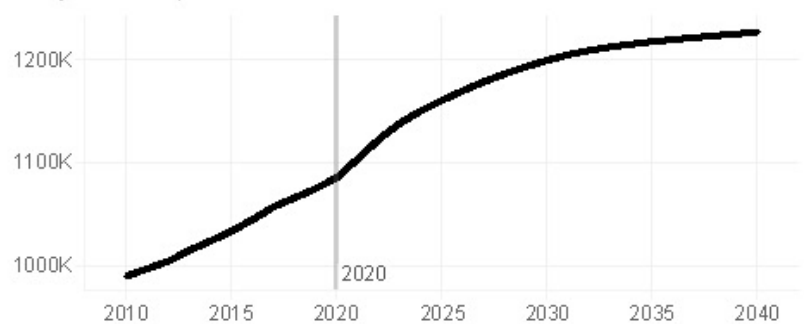
Projected Population Total for Selected Counties



For the current year (2023), the city of Kalispell showed the fourth highest percentage increase in population from the prior year at [4.5%](#).

Overall, the state of Montana's population is also [projected](#) to increase:

Projected Population Total for State of Montana



Based on the estimated growth, both statewide and local to the Flathead region, it is anticipated that the offender population from that area will also grow, further supporting the need for a facility to provide additional prerelease beds to the correctional system.



## Regional Correctional Population:

- The DOC reviewed sentencing information for offenders during the period of July 1, 2023 through June 15, 2024 and found that 154 offenders were committed to the DOC for a full or partial custodial sentence who were sentenced out of Flathead, Lake, or Lincoln Counties.
- As of June 15, 2024, the number of offenders currently in a prerelease center who were serving on a court case from the [Kalispell Region was 136](#).
- These offenders are offenders who, had there been a facility in their region of origin, may have benefited from structured step-down or step-up services close to their hometown.

## Documentation of Service Availability:

As required in ARM, MDOC examined the services available in Flathead County to determine service availability for offenders in a proposed prerelease center. The following information was compiled:

- **Appropriate mental health and chemical dependency services**

According to the Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services, the full continuum of [mental health](#) and [substance use treatment services](#) are available in Kalispell through licensed providers.

- **Adequate job opportunities as determined by appropriate state agencies**

Overall, Montana's unemployment rate was [3.1%](#) for May, 2024. Flathead County's rate was calculated at 3.3% for the same period, showing a need for more workers in the area. Traditionally, a key component of a prerelease center program is the requirement for resident to work. The addition of a 90-bed prerelease center potentially adds 90 workers to the area. Further, many prerelease center residents take positions in the service industry, which may be the hardest positions to fill.

- **Opportunities for basic education, GED, technical training, and postsecondary education**

Kalispell is home to the largest community college in Montana, Flathead Valley Community College (FVCC). The Kalispell-based college provides instruction for over [10,000 students](#) each year and offers a large selection of two-year programs as well as many four-year opportunities. FVCC's [Community Education Program](#) provides the community with opportunities related to [workforce training](#) and [apprenticeships](#), as well as [high school equivalency preparatory and testing services](#).

- **Opportunities for volunteer and community service**

There are a multitude of volunteer and community service opportunities in Kalispell. Among others, the area is home to the following organizations in need of volunteers:

- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
- [The Flathead Food Bank](#)
- [The Flathead County Animal Shelter](#)
- [Samaritan House](#)
- [Montana State Parks](#)
- [The Flathead Trails Association](#)
- [DREAM Adaptive Recreation](#)

