

# ECONOMIC IMPACT



## THE BILLINGS-RURAL PARTNERSHIP: OUR DYNAMIC REGIONAL ECONOMY

### YELLOWSTONE COUNTY: BRAIN GAIN AND GROWTH ON THE HORIZON

#### POPULATION DENSITY: RURAL AND URBAN RESIDENT BREAKDOWN:

**Rural Population:** 27,181 (15.8%)    **Urban Population:** 144,851 (84.2%)    **Yellowstone County Total:** 172,032

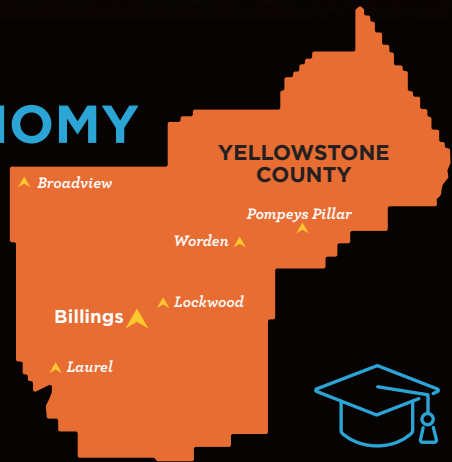
Source: Montana Site Selector Community Profile Report, 2024

#### 5 YEAR OUTLOOK: YELLOWSTONE COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS FOR 2030

- **Population Change and Percentage Growth (2024–2029)**
  - Rural: 27,181 → 28,162 (+981, 3.61%)
  - Urban (Billings): 144,851 → 149,196 (+4,345, 3.02%)
  - Yellowstone County: 172,032 → 177,358 (+5,326, 3.09%)

Source: Montana Site Selector Market Profile Report, 2024

• **Brain Gain** is defined as an influx of educated and skilled workers into an economy, as opposed to brain drain. At **3.61% growth over 5 years**, rural Yellowstone County will see a steady and manageable growth rate without putting excessive strain on resources.



#### THE NEXT GENERATION: EDUCATING OUR STUDENTS AND FUTURE WORKFORCE

Billings School District #2 (SD2) is the largest district in Montana and Yellowstone County is home to 3 of Montana's 5 largest high schools.

#### • K-12 Schools and Student Distribution

Rural	Urban	Yellowstone County
• 14 Elementary Schools	• 29 Elementary Schools	• 68 Schools Total
• 10 Middle Schools	• 11 Middle Schools	• 43 Elementary Schools
• 6 High Schools	• 8 High Schools	• 21 Middle Schools
• Total Students: 6,986 (public)	• Total Students: 16,568 (public) + 3,527 (private) = 20,095	• 14 High Schools
		• 8 Private Schools

**Total Students: 20,095 (Urban) + 6,986 (Rural) = 27,081 total students in Yellowstone County, almost the equivalent of the entire population of Helena.**

- **The Next Step: Higher Education, Technical Training, and Apprenticeship**
  - Career and Technical Education (CTE) Participation: **505 Students (Urban) / 110 Students (Rural) / 4,147 Students (State)**
    - Yellowstone County CTE students represent **15% of Montana's total CTE enrollment.**
  - Student Achievement Progress Scores
    - Percentage of students graduating in 4 years: **84% (Urban / 89% (Rural) / 85% (State))**
    - Percentage of students who are college or career ready: **53% (Urban) / 74% (Rural) / 62% (State)**

The college or career readiness rate measures how well students meet academic, technical, and life skills benchmarks for success after high school. Billings Public Schools builds on this with its Graduate Profile, adding "Power Skills" like collaboration, resilience, and problem-solving to ensure students graduate adaptable and prepared to thrive in college, careers, and beyond.

Source: District Report Cards, Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2023. Yellowstone County Superintendent of Schools, 2024. Graduate Profile Presentation, Billings Public Schools, 2025



#### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BREAKDOWN (2024)

- Rural Average: **\$76,114**
- Urban Average: **\$85,329**
- Yellowstone County Average: **\$82,725**

Source: Montana Site Selector Community Profile Report, 2024

#### AGE DISTRIBUTION:

Percentage Under 18, Working Age, And Over 65

Rural	Urban
• Under 18: 18%	• Under 18: 16%
• Working Age (18-64): 65%	• Working Age (18-64): 69%
• Over 65: 17%	• Over 65: 15%

**Total Workforce in Yellowstone County: 89,000 People**  
By 2030, the workforce is projected to grow to approximately **102,000.**

Source: Montana Site Selector Community Profile Report, 2024, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics County Employment and Wages Report, 2024.

## THE IMPACT OF ECONOMIC EXPANSION AND CONTRACTION ON OUR REGION

"If we value things like abundant local food, great wildlife habitat, open space and a strong economy that can create renewable wealth year after year in a harsh environment, then we must focus on helping sustain the family farms that produce those benefits for the rest of us."

➢ Taylor Brown, Northern Ag Network and the Voice of Montana Agriculture

Source: Yellowstone Valley Woman Magazine



Agriculture accounts for approximately **95% OF TOTAL COUNTY LAND USE**, demonstrating its foundational role in our local economy.

Source: Yellowstone County Agriculture Impact Report, 2022, Montana State University Extension, 2024.

#### MONTANA VS. YELLOWSTONE COUNTY AG BY THE NUMBERS

Montana	Yellowstone County
• \$6.22B Industry	• \$140.7M Industry
• 24,266 Farms and Ranches	• 1,186 Farms & Ranches
• 57.6M Acres	• 1.43M Acres

#### CROP PRODUCTION COMPARED: MONTANA VS. YELLOWSTONE COUNTY

Montana	Yellowstone County
• Chickpea, Lentil, & Dry Edible Pea Production	• Hay, Wheat, Barley, Sugarbeets, and Corn



Source: Montana Department of Agriculture, 2024, USDA Census of Agriculture Data, 2022.

### A REGIONAL HUB FOR HEALTHCARE, RETAIL, ENTERTAINMENT, AND MORE



Yellowstone County serves as one of the largest trade areas in the country, with an expansive trade, distribution, and retail hub for Montana east of the Continental Divide, Northern Wyoming, and parts of North and South Dakota.

- ▶ **Total Billings Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) for 2024**
  - ▶ **Counties Included:** Yellowstone County, Carbon County & Stillwater County
  - ▶ **Total Population: 192,624** ▶ **Total GDP: \$14.5 billion**
- ▶ **41% of hospital billing in Yellowstone County comes from patients residing outside of the county.**

Source: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 2025.



**Billings Logan International Airport serves as the #1 cargo airport in Montana, and th 53rd busiest cargo airport in the country.**

Retail trade is a key driver of employment in Yellowstone County, supporting **11,294 jobs across various sectors.** This industry accounts for **over 13% of the county's total workforce.**

- ▶ **Retail Fast Facts:**
  - ▶ **Fastest Growing:** Sporting Goods Retailers (+154 jobs in 5 years)
  - ▶ **Highest Wages:** New Car Dealers (\$84,452/year)
  - ▶ **Biggest Decline:** Supermarkets (-97 jobs in 5 years)
  - ▶ **Most Job Openings:** Warehouse Clubs (302 projected hire)

Source: Industry Snapshot, JobsEQ 2025., Explore Billings, City of Billings, 2024., Montana Talks, 2023.

### EMPLOYMENT DATA

2025 Population Employment by Occupation in Yellowstone County

- ▶ **89,000 workers** are employed in Yellowstone County, accounting for **16.8%** of the state's total employment.
- ▶ **Top 5 industries by employment in Yellowstone County:**
  - **1. Healthcare and social services** is the largest sector of employment in Yellowstone County, accounting for the largest percentage of private sector jobs at **15,448 employees**
  - **2. Retail Trade: 11,294 total employees**
  - **3. Accommodation and Food Services: 10,412 total employees**
  - **4. Construction: 7,321 total employees**
  - **5. Wholesale trade: 5,523 total employees**

**Workforce Snapshot: Top 5 active job postings in Yellowstone County**

- ▶ **Registered Nurses: 1,845** active job postings
- ▶ **First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers: 986** active job postings
- ▶ **Medical and Health Services Managers: 933** active job postings
- ▶ **Sales Representatives: 762** active job postings
- ▶ **Retail Salespersons: 758** active job postings

Source: Montana Site Selector Market Profile Report, 2024., U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics County Employment and Wages Report, 2024, JobsEQ 2025

**Number of new businesses in Yellowstone County (2022-2024)**  
**5,935 → 7,843**  
**(+32.15%)**

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau

**Number of new employees in Yellowstone County (2022-2024)**  
**73,119 → 102,149**  
**(+39.70%)**

This accounts for travel, construction, and seasonal work within Yellowstone County.

### STILLWATER MINE IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

In 2024, the Stillwater mine laid off about 700 workers (40% of their total workforce) due to a decline in revenue from low metal prices.

- ▶ **Key Services Needed: Financial Assistance, Job Relocation, Apprenticeships**
- ▶ **Top Training Interests: Heavy Machinery/CDL, Welding, Electrician, Business Management**

Source: Mine Rapid Response Survey, Department of Labor & Industry, 2024.



- ▶ **766** Affected Workers / **30%** Have a Spouse Seeking Work
- ▶ **66%** Employed 5+ Years / **58%** Expect to Switch Fields
- ▶ **60%** Interested in Training / **61%** Seek Skills Upgrade Training
- ▶ **65%** Have Children / **24%** Require Childcare
- ▶ **90%** Concerned About Health Insurance / **75%** Concerned About Mortgage Payments

Source: Mine Rapid Response Survey, Department of Labor & Industry, 2024.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: ENERGY, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND TECHNOLOGY

### COLSTRIP: MONTANA'S EVOLVING ENERGY HUB

The Colstrip Plant is one of the largest 1,500-megawatt coal-fired facilities in the Northwest, supplying Montana and neighboring states. As of 2025, ownership will be comprised of Northwestern Energy, Talen Energy, and PacifiCorp.

- ▶ **We've got the power:**
  - ▶ According to Northwestern Energy, the addition of the Colstrip Plant and the Yellowstone County Generating Station will provide enough power to support customer needs. Without this addition, Northwestern Energy would have faced an immediate deficit.
  - ▶ The Northern Plains Connector is an approximately 420 mile and up to 525 kilovolt high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line connecting the U.S. Eastern and Western electric grids in Montana and North Dakota. North Plains Connector will be open to all sources of electrical power generation. In response to demand, the project will be able to transport power in either direction along the line.

North Plains Connector is entering the permitting phase and initiating regulatory filings, with approvals expected in 2026. Construction is expected to commence in 2028, and the line is expected to be operational in 2032.

- ▶ **Once completed, this project has the capability of serving 20 states.**

Sources: Bureau of Business and Economic Research, North Plains Connector, 2025, "Hard look at Energy and Future of Colstrip, Big Sky Business Journal, 2024"



### EMERGING INFRASTRUCTURE

- ▶ **Yellowstone County Generating Station - 175 MW natural gas plant in Laurel with 18 engines for on-demand power, anticipating \$4.26M in annual tax revenue.**  
Source: Yellowstone County Generating Station, NorthWestern Energy, 2024
- ▶ **Billings Bypass Project - Six-phase road project connecting I-90 (Lockwood) to US-87 (Billings Heights). Yellowstone River Bridge complete, Railroad Overpass to open by July 2025, full completion by 2028.**  
Source: Billings Bypass Project, Montana Department of Transportation, 2024
- ▶ **Coulson Park Development - 50+ acre riverfront project with bike track, sculpture parks, dog park, and seating, 28K+ vehicles/day on I-90 pass the park, boosting regional appeal.**  
Source: Coulson Park Master Plan, Billings Parks and Recreation, 2020
- ▶ **West End Water Treatment Plant - \$100M project boosting Billings' water capacity to 18M gallons/day. Serving 160,000-180,000 people, with room for expansion. Construction began in 2024, with completion set for 2026. Cost excludes the reservoir, which is still being finalized.**  
Source: City of Billings Public Works, Water Quality Superintendent, 2025
- ▶ **Total Housing Units and Annual Growth Rate (2020-2024)**

<b>Rural: 5.02%</b> (4,142 → 4,350) (+208 units)	<b>Urban: 4.68%</b> (52,646 → 55,108) (+2,462 units)	<b>Yellowstone County: 4.78%</b> (56,788 → 59,458) (+2,670 units)
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Source: Montana Site Selector Community Profile Report, 2024

### YELLOWSTONE COUNTY TOP 10 EXPORT COMMODITIES (2022)

- ▶ **Vehicles, Except Railway, Tramway, and Parts Etc.: \$39,623,198**
- ▶ **Mineral Fuel, Oil Etc.; Bitumin Subst; Mineral Wax: \$39,062,789**
- ▶ **Industrial Machinery, Including Computers: \$29,662,077**
- ▶ **Cereals: \$11,112,343**
- ▶ **Meat And Edible Meat Offal: \$10,358,376**
- ▶ **Miscellaneous Chemical Products: \$8,116,118**
- ▶ **Pharmaceutical Products: \$5,254,556**
- ▶ **Live Animals: \$5,076,310**
- ▶ **Oil Seeds Etc.: Misc Grain, Seed, Fruit, Plant Etc.: \$2,892,403**
- ▶ **Iron And Steel: \$2,609,176**

Source: Montana Department of Commerce

### YELLOWSTONE COUNTY TOP 10 TRADE PARTNER COUNTRIES (2022)

- ▶ **Canada: \$87,396,537**
- ▶ **Mexico: \$13,055,502**
- ▶ **Netherlands: \$12,857,034**
- ▶ **Japan: \$6,802,066**
- ▶ **United Kingdom: \$6,491,353**
- ▶ **China: \$6,280,324**
- ▶ **Belgium: \$4,995,879**
- ▶ **Australia: \$4,548,989**
- ▶ **South Korea: \$3,603,171**
- ▶ **France: \$2,485,365**

Source: Montana Department of Commerce

