

Message From MOGA

The Outfitting industry is struggling to survive. Like other businesses in Montana, this industry is in a desperate condition fueled by shared community health concerns, confusing and often contradictory guidance, and the gravity of the economic consequence of policies intended to address the pandemic. Toss into the mix the multiple agencies and jurisdictions involved. Nothing you don't already know.

Unlike other businesses, Outfitted tourist is the economic driver, particularly in rural communities. People in those communities where evidence of the pandemic is primary through the news, legitimate questions arise as to when will the 14-day quarantine be lifted and what level of services can be provided in the mean time.

MOGA has worked tirelessly on behalf of ALL of the industry over the last several weeks. As you will see in the following stories we have achieved some refinements to policy that will aid the industry, support local economies and place community health above all else.

In the short run, a key strategy is [incremental opening of Outfitted service](#). For example, some outfitter businesses can operate posing minimal risk to community health then they should be allowed to do so. The remote facility that can provide controlled quarantine level accommodation by addressing lodging and meal management ought to be able to provide recreational services under the social distancing standards and personal hygiene recommendations, and do so in a manner that constitutes MINIMAL threat to the health of our communities.

In the long run, we need to remain informed and engaged with the political leaders trusted to manage the States response. MOGA remains committed to providing the best source of information to the Outfitter and Guide Community. We will continue to share these materials with all members of the industry regardless of your membership affiliation.

We will continue to advocate policy changes that are beneficial to all segments of the industry that places an emphasis on protecting our community health.

Regardless of your position, we need you to know that MOGA, as the lead trade association for the industry, has been working on many fronts to:

- 1) help keep members and non-members informed,

2) *provided specific recommendations of actions that Outfitters need to do NOW,*

3) *ensuring you have the tools and support to act on those recommendations, and*

4) *work with state and federal officials on plans to mitigate the economic impacts while being mindful of the health and safety risks we all place first.*

It has been said that "Uncertainly rewards preparedness!"

Governor Bullock Announces \$123 Million Available in Emergency Grants

Governor Steve Bullock today announced that families, small businesses, non-profits, health services centers and individuals across Montana hardest-hit by impacts of COVID-19 will be eligible to apply for grants through nine new programs created in response to the emergency.

Beginning **Thursday, May 7**, Montanans out of work, families with limited resources, small businesses, non-profits and others can apply for financial relief for things like rental and mortgage assistance, business and non-profit grants, grants to serve seniors and those living with a disability, food banks and local food producers.

[VIEW THE LIST OF GRANT PROGRAMS](#)

A comprehensive information resource and application portal is available at COVIDRELIEF.MT.GOV. The application portion of the website will go live at 8:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 7. To prepare for the application, businesses and non-profits should have their tax ID, proof of business registration, a brief description of how the grant will be spent, and a brief description of how COVID-19 has impacted operations. Homeowners and renters should have bank account information available and verification of job or income loss.

MOGA has retained Jami Welch to assist ANY MOGA member with getting applications processed.

Contact Jami Welch
jwbooks1606@gmail.com

Protect Your Family and Your Business using approved Liability Waiver & Release Documents

Are you one of the MOGA Member Outfitters who has NOT taken advantage of the help MOGA can provide to protect you, your business, and your family from unnecessary risk? If so, please take a few minutes and take the steps necessary to get the protection MOGA fought hard to attain for you and your business.

Waiver and Release documents are now an industry standard but to be effective they must be IN COMPLIANCE with Montana Statutes. MOGA has made it easy for you to get a tailored Waiver and Release form that meets the standards set out in law.

Additionally we have created an Addendum that will cover the required Corona Virus documentation that some Federal agencies are now requiring.

If you are interested in this MOGA member benefit then please contact:

Kashia Herring
mogaoffice@mt.net
406 449 3578

[Email the MOGA Office](#)

FWP forwards License Recommendation to Governor for Approval

The MOGA recommendation to provide Big Game licenses to all non-residents who applied but failed to draw a tag AND were booked with an outfitter was forwarded to the Governor with the endorsement of FWP Director Williams.

Deemed a measure to stimulate the economy, the issuance of additional licenses is expected to generate an additional \$10 million in general commerce, particularly important in rural communities, and approximately \$2.6 million in license revenue.

If approved by the Governor, Outfitters would submit a list of client names that had booked a trip and applied for a license (NOT PERMITS) but failed to draw. Should the additional licenses be issued then the Department would do away with the Alternate List for this year and look at returned licenses as a means to come to alignment with statutory guidance.

"We are delighted that the leadership of the Department viewed this action as an economic stimulus that it is. With an average of \$5000 of commerce generated for every outfitted non-resident visitor served it does not take many to have a material impact on rural communities. Now it is up to the Governor to act." said Mac Minard, MOGA Executive Director

[READ THE MOGA RECOMMENDATIONS](#)

Updated Guidance for Reopening Outfitted Tourism

Nothing has been more frustrating than trying to navigate the everchanging waters related to what you can and cannot do as an outfitter during the COVID 19 pandemic. The Administration has issued orders delivered and updated on March 30th and April 4th of 2020, as well as subsequent releases from your Office of Outdoor Recreation (3/1/20), State Emergency Operations Center (4/14/20) and Montana D.E.S. (4/27/20). There are inconsistencies in material that has been disseminated over the last several weeks and conflicting guidance, particularly related to 14-day quarantine requirements.

What is NEW at the State Level

The most recent [Guidance was issued by the Governor](#) last Friday at 3:40 pm. Relative to providing outfitted services and the 14-day quarantine restriction this one made it clear that:

- *14-day Quarantine is not applied to outfitted services taking place on private lands. So, if you are offering hunting and fishing services on private lands you can do so.*
- *You must confirm customers from out-of-state have met the 14-day quarantine requirement. Customers who have traveled to Montana from out-of-state must have completed the 14-day quarantine requirement before hunting and fishing on public lands. Many outfitters are requiring clients to simply sign an affidavit that they have quarantined. The Outfitter has no obligation to reach beyond asking the question.*

What is New at the Forest Service Level

"Guidance for Use of NFS lands including the Operation of Recreation Sites and Services" provided by the Forest Service was issued recently as well and is equally unclear.

- *MOGA's interpretation of the guidance document is that it encourages Forests and Line Officers to align their policies/requirements/etc. with applicable State and Local orders and guidelines for reopening.*
- *Some MOGA Outfitters have reported that fee schedules and payments have been waived, deferred, or otherwise mitigated. If you have not already done so it would be wise to check with your permit administrator and discuss how to reduce your fee payments this year to the minimum level required by Congress.*

Here is an Excerpt Related to Guiding and Outfitting:

Permitted recreation providers are an essential part of reopening recreation sites and services. The above Guidance for Reopening Recreation Sites applies to all recreation offerings, whether operated by the Forest Service, permittees or partners. The following additional guidance is intended for permitted operations. It is the Agency's intent to support permittees as best as possible in resuming operations.

Collaborate with permittees when working on your reopening strategy to ensure alignment. Permittees may also provide industry best practices and leverage private industry supply chains for PPE, etc.

If a permit has been temporarily suspended, it needs to be reinstated prior to operation. (Sample reinstatement letter to be provided by the WO).

- *Per the terms of their permit, permittees are required to follow local and State laws, including public health guidance.*
- *When possible, consider offering extended operating seasons and amending operating plans at the request of the permittee.*
- *Consider inherent differences in social distancing ability across permitted operations.*
- *When possible, use consistent, unified communication methods so that although openings may vary across areas, permitted operations can go to a centralized location to view operating information.*

Additional Frequently Asked Questions and Answers will be provided for more detailed responses.

Read the Full Guidance Document [Here](#)

What has MOGA Been Doing?

Developed an Affidavit that is available to MOGA members to assist you in service to non-resident clients. You do not need one of these if you are on Private Land. Call Mac 406 439 2059 or email at moqa@mt.net for assistance.

We have done extensive research trying to find who is enforcing this rule and what they are looking for in terms of compliance. We have engaged the Attorney General, the Office of Outdoor Recreation and the Governor's office. To be blunt, there is no enforcement and there is no agency taking responsibility to do so. In speaking with the Attorney General Office and higher-level Forest Service staff it is clear there is no interest in actively pursuing this issue with the exception of massive negligence.

Discussions with numerous County Attorneys have yielded a similar result with some exceptions.

MOGA Vice President authored a [letter to Governor Bullock](#) requesting clarification outlined concerns the industry has and asked specific questions that when answered will assist businesses for planning for the season. We asked what metrics are being

considered and when was it likely or under what conditions, could we expect to see the 14-day restriction lifted.

We have requested meetings with the Governors Office and have yet to be contacted as to when.

President Elect Dusty Crary reached out to lead Forest Service staff and receive assurances that the FS had not intention of overlaying additional restrictions above that of the State.

This situation remains dynamic and we will continue to monitor and press for reasonable policy that will protect the public health but allow for commerce to take place.

There is clearly a need within Montana business community to see phased in relaxation of the shutdown/in orders. Re opening actions should be accompanied with industry adopted standards that will minimize risk of transmission and spread of Corona-virus. The following are a set of recommended actions that will have immediate positive impacts for the Outfitted tourism industry and afford minimal risk of transmissions or spread of Corona-virus.

[READ THE RECOMMENDATIONS](#)

Trails Stimulus Bill Ready for Introduction to Congress

I am thrilled to be supporting the work of the Montana Outfitters and Guides Association (MOGA) in federal government affairs specifically to secure Congressional authorization and effective implementation of a proposal to put back to work permitted outfitters and guide crews idled as our nation isolates in place to reduce the spread of COVID-19. With over 11 years of experience on Capitol Hill primarily in the natural resources policy area, I have begun to leverage my public policy expertise and networks throughout Capitol Hill

and the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) to the extent possible adhering to Senate post-employment rules to advance your organizations' goals.

Specifically, in partnership with Mac Minard, Executive Director of MOGA, we sent a [letter to Senate and House leadership](#) in Congress calling for action to allow the Forest Service to partner with federally permitted outfitters and guides to perform trail maintenance work and combat noxious weeds and invasive species contaminating watersheds. The Forest Service has a \$314 million trail maintenance backlog and an additional \$210 million backlog in annual maintenance, capital improvements. Vast swaths of Forest Service land are contaminated with noxious weeds and invasive species. We wrote to Congress that federally permitted outfitters and guides are uniquely equipped with the expertise, equipment and skilled workforce necessary to quickly and effectively address these needs of the agency. As many outfitter businesses face at least a 40% reduction in trips this season due to COVID-19, our effort can mutually benefit our small businesses and the Forest Service alike.

We would like to thank the Alaska Professional Hunters Association, Colorado Outfitters Association, Idaho Outfitter and Guide Association, Maine Professional Guides Association, New Mexico Council of Outfitters and Guides, Nevada Outfitter and Guide Association, Wyoming Outfitter and Guide Association, and the Safari Club International for joining us as signatories on this letter.

Following letter distribution, between Mac and me, we have had several positive conversations with letter recipients and the proposal's lead sponsor, Senator Daines. Mac has led communication with Senator Daines staff and has indicated bill introduction will be coming very soon.

I have also followed up with Forest Service officials to discuss our proposal. I specifically encouraged support to improve the contracting process for this work to ensure these agreements are economical for outfitters. I expect follow-up conversations with the Acquisition division about that effort moving forward.

We have significant momentum behind our efforts to get permitted outfitters and guides back to work this summer; but we cannot stop now. With bill introduction happening in the Senate soon, we encourage you all to contact your Congressional delegation for their support and stay in touch as those conversations unfold. We will remain in contact as we work with the Forest Service on implementation as well.

Thank you for your trust in me during this trying time. I will keep you, your family and your business in my prayers and hope to see you on trail soon!

Sincerely,

Meghan Thacker
President
Big Sky Bluewater Strategies, LLC