

Hot Spot Lending Program

September 1, 2023

Access to the Internet is a universal need but one that goes unmet for far too many Montanans due to lack of available or affordable Internet service. As the state continues to build broadband infrastructure, Montana State Library helps bridge access through a hot spot lending program. Originally established during the COVID-19 pandemic, the program continues to demonstrate high use among Montana library patrons.

The [Hot Spot Lending Program dashboard](#) tracks and visualizes data regarding the program (see slides in appendix A).

Hot Spot Program Summary

- 92 libraries lend 973 hot spots across 53 counties.
- Across the lifetime of the program, hot spots have provided 2.19M gigabytes (2.19 petabytes) of data.
- In the most recent Verizon and T-Mobile statement period (July 2023), library hot spots delivered 73,703 gigabytes of data, 12% more than the same period in FY 2023.

Urban-Rural Use

- The U.S. Census Bureau delineates urban areas after each decennial census based on population density. Based on the Census definition, 21 participating public library locations qualify as urban while 52 locations qualify as rural. The remaining locations represent schools and academic libraries.
- Rural hot spot lending libraries serve 223,352 Montanans with 383 hot spots. Patrons of these libraries use 4.092 GB data per capita.
- Urban hot spot lending libraries serve 831,299 Montanans with 468 hot spots. Patrons of these libraries use 1.153 GB data per capita.

Use Details

- The State Library documents hot spot gigabyte data use by library and device each month using vendor statements.
- The top five lending locations are Rosebud County Library, Missoula Public Library, Big Horn County Library, Mineral County Library, and Great Falls Public Library.

Library Policies

- Montana State Library surveyed all participating libraries to understand local policies regarding hot spot circulation.

- 100% of responding libraries (75 out of 92) report that all hot spots use, including any commercial use, is done in accordance with library policy. As school and academic librarians return to the classroom, the State Library will collect responses from the remaining participants.
- Examples of commercial use:
 - A local entrepreneur in Forsyth borrowed a hot spot to record a podcast on rural business and agriculture: [Governor Gianforte on business, entrepreneurship and agritourism - YouTube](#)
 - A business in Havre borrowed a hot spot during a brief Internet outage to join an online meeting.
 - A coffee shop in Kalispell borrowed a hot spot to file taxes and design cup labels.
- Library policies set rules regarding checkout length, renewals, and overdue fines that all patrons must follow. Some libraries additionally require patrons to sign a user agreement (see an example from White Fish Community Library in appendix B). Libraries can suspend the device through the service provider if use is not in compliance with library policy (i.e., when the device becomes overdue). Hot spots require patrons to enter a password to connect.
- All libraries restrict use to a limited checkout period. 72% lend hot spots for two weeks.
- 51% of libraries do not allow patrons to renew hot spot checkouts.
- 74% of libraries do not charge overdue fines (not including replacement fees for unreturned, lost, or damaged devices).

User Feedback

- 48% of hot spot borrowers report using the device for work or school tasks such as completing homework, checking school information, searching for employment, or applying for jobs. Additional users report informal educational uses like researching a topic of interest or learning a new skill.
- Most popularly, 52% of borrowers report using the device to “keep informed of current events.”
- 70% of borrowers do not have household Internet access or rely on cellular data.
- 95% of hot spot users report that they plan to borrow a hot spot from the library again.

Montana Internet Access

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-year estimates, 66,099 Montana households do not have Internet access.
- Some of the counties with the highest percent of households without Internet access demonstrate high hot spot use:
 - Roosevelt County – 32% of households do not have Internet. Roosevelt County Library (36,133 GB data use) and James E. Shanley Tribal Library (41,651 GB data use) lend hot spots.
 - Mineral County – 31% of households do not have Internet. Mineral County Public Library (119,182 GB data use) lends hot spots.



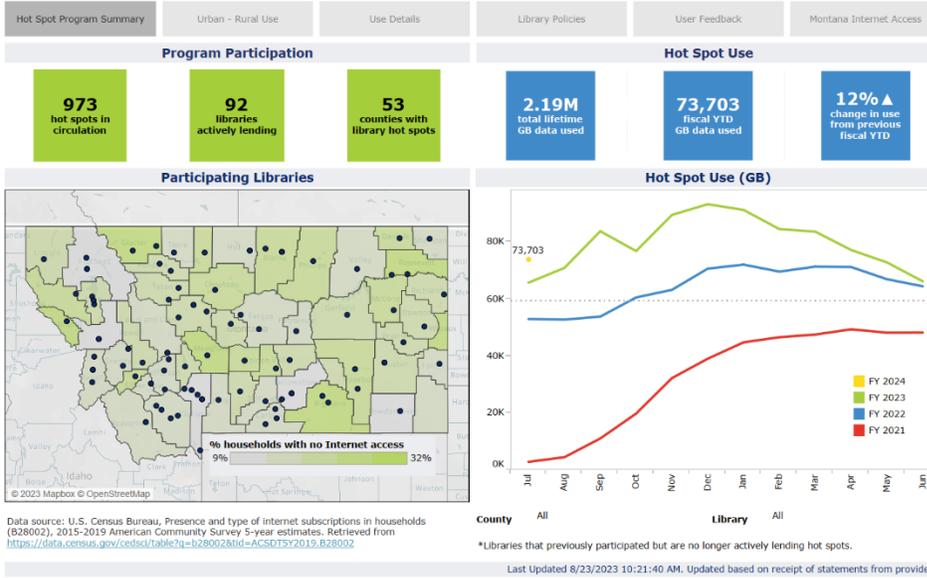
- Big Horn County – 28% of households do not have Internet. Big Horn County Public Library (131,296 GB data use) and Little Big Horn College Library (41,287 GB data use) lend hot spots.
- Rosebud County – 26% of households do not have Internet. Rosebud County Library (154,516 GB data use) and Bicentennial Library of Colstrip (31,111 GB data use) lend hot spots.

Future Research

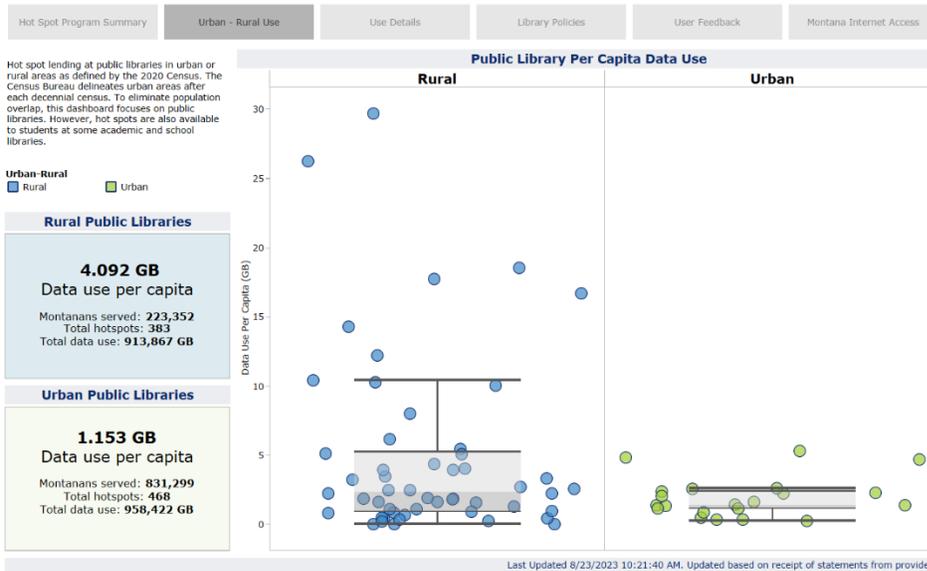
- As the program continues, Montana State Library plans to identify under-used devices and shift those devices strategically to areas with more need. MSL will also work with libraries to identify damaged or lost hot spots to update inventory lists.
- Through this research, MSL will work to identify efficiencies in program management.
- MSL will survey participants to assess ongoing community need and library interest in continuing this service.

Appendix A Dashboard Slides

HOT SPOT PROGRAM SUMMARY



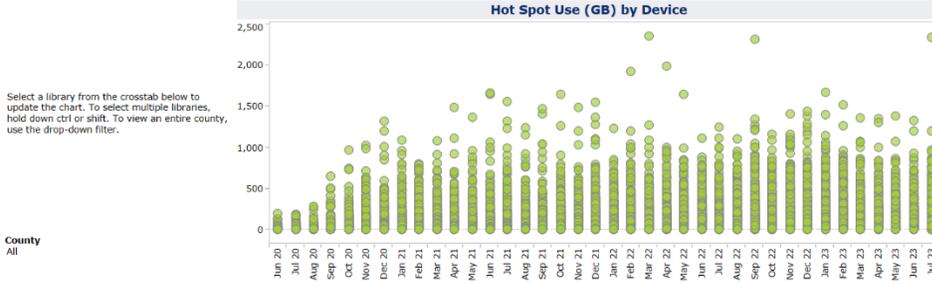
HOT SPOT URBAN - RURAL USE





HOT SPOT USE DETAILS

Hot Spot Program Summary Urban - Rural Use **Use Details** Library Policies User Feedback Montana Internet Access



Hot Spot Use (GB) by Library

| | Grand Total | Jul-23 | Jun-23 | May-23 | Apr-23 | Mar-23 | Feb-23 | Jan-23 | De |
|--------------------------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| Rosebud County Library | 154,516 | 8,890 | 5,320 | 5,196 | 6,230 | 8,614 | 7,187 | 7,837 | |
| Missoula Public Library | 152,718 | 4,305 | 3,778 | 5,413 | 5,663 | 5,420 | 4,420 | 5,511 | |
| Big Horn County Public Library | 131,296 | 2,177 | 2,408 | 2,337 | 2,211 | 2,756 | 2,877 | 3,115 | |
| Mineral County Public Library | 119,182 | 2,619 | 3,873 | 5,037 | 6,147 | 5,173 | 5,465 | 5,476 | |
| Great Falls Public Library | 115,959 | 3,945 | 4,263 | 4,155 | 4,129 | 4,373 | 3,739 | 3,952 | |
| Imagine!F Kalspell | 110,594 | 4,049 | 2,838 | 3,897 | 4,801 | 4,213 | 3,434 | 4,007 | |
| Lincoln County Library | 94,042 | 3,596 | 3,424 | 2,537 | 2,324 | 2,840 | 3,176 | 3,090 | |
| Bitterroot Public Library | 56,898 | 2,273 | 1,656 | 1,109 | 1,881 | 1,458 | 1,964 | 2,015 | |
| Sidney-Richland County Library | 53,610 | 2,410 | 1,661 | 2,983 | 1,868 | 3,577 | 4,323 | 4,591 | |

*Libraries that previously participated but are no longer actively lending hot spots. Last Updated 8/23/2023 10:21:40 AM. Updated based on receipt of statements from providers.



HOT SPOT LIBRARY POLICIES

Hot Spot Program Summary Urban - Rural Use Use Details **Library Policies** User Feedback Montana Internet Access

Commercial Use Policy

100% of libraries verified that any commercial use is consistent with library policy.

- 75 out of 92 libraries reporting. Library survey in progress.
- Library policies set rules regarding checkout length, renewals, and overdue fines that patrons must follow.
 - Some libraries additionally require patrons to sign a user agreement (see the example from Whitefish Community Library below).
 - Libraries can suspend the device through the service provider if use is not in compliance with library policy (i.e., when the device becomes overdue).
 - Hot spots require patrons to enter a password to connect.

| Checkout Length | | Example Hot Spot User Agreement |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 7 days | 11% of libraries | |
| 14 days | 72% of libraries | |
| 21 days | 3% of libraries | |
| 28 days | 8% of libraries | |
| Other | 6% of libraries | |
| Checkout Renewals | | |
| No renewals | 51% of libraries | |
| Renewals | 49% of libraries | |
| Checkout Overdue Fines | | |
| No fines | 74% of libraries | |
| Fines | 26% of libraries | |

Last Updated 8/28/2023 8:10:41 AM.

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Library
All

Education and Job Search Tasks

48%

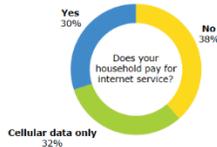
of hot spot users report using the device for work or school tasks such as completing homework, checking school information, searching for employment, or applying for jobs. Additional users report informal educational uses like researching a topic of interest or learning a new skill.

Percent of Users Reporting Online Activities

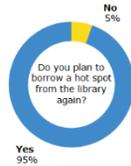
| | |
|--|-----|
| Keep informed of current events | 52% |
| Research a topic of interest | 50% |
| Connect with family and friends | 42% |
| View entertainment | 43% |
| Use social media | 40% |
| Access online health or telehealth services | 38% |
| Fill out forms (social services, taxes, etc.) | 37% |
| Purchase items online | 33% |
| Look up directions or transportation information | 31% |
| Complete homework | 30% |
| Check information about schools | 24% |
| Learn a new skill | 23% |
| Look for/apply to jobs | 23% |
| Play computer games | 21% |
| Enroll in or attend an educational class | 16% |
| Other | 13% |

Data collected from Hot Spot User Survey, 782 responses to date.

Internet Service



Return Borrowers



Last Updated 8/17/2023 4:25:42 PM.

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Internet Access Type by Total MT Households

| | |
|------------------------------------|--------|
| Cable, fiber optic or DSL | |
| Cellular data plan | |
| No access | 66,099 |
| Satellite | |
| Access without a subscription only | 13,257 |
| Dial-up only | 3,353 |
| Other | |

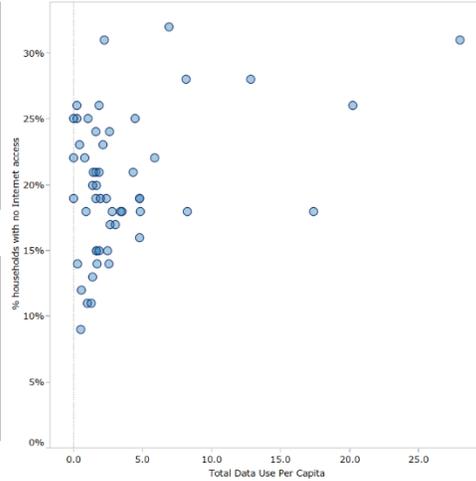
Some households may have multiple types of connection.

% Households without Internet

| | |
|-----------|-----|
| Roosevelt | 32% |
| Mineral | 31% |
| Glacier | 31% |
| Wilboux | 29% |
| Meagher | 28% |
| Big Horn | 28% |
| Sanders | 26% |
| Rosebud | 26% |

Data source: U.S. Census Bureau, Presence and type of internet subscriptions in households (B28002), 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. Retrieved from https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=b28002&t=ACSDT5Y2019_B28002

Per Capita Hot Spot Use



Last Updated 8/23/2023 10:21:40 AM. Updated based on receipt of statements from providers.

Appendix B

Whitefish Community Library Example User Agreement

WHITEFISH COMMUNITY LIBRARY MOBILE DEVICE USER AGREEMENT

1. You must be 18 years of age and a WCL card holder *[not temporary]* in good standing.
2. **Hotspots, iPads or laptops can be checked out for 2 weeks (14 days). All devices, cables and original packaging must be returned to the Circulation Desk inside the library at 9 Spokane Ave., Whitefish, MT. In the case of overdue hotspots, data service will be suspended, and future device use may be barred (see #11).**
3. I understand that Whitefish Community Library has no control over and cannot guarantee the availability of hotspot service or continuous service or speed of connection.
4. I understand that I am responsible for monitoring what my children and other minors access or view while using WCL devices.
5. I understand that I must agree to all Whitefish Community Library policies regarding Internet use, including 2023-Use of Library Computers, 2026-Website Access Policy (on WCL webpage) plus Verizon's Acceptable Use Policy, and all Federal and State Laws.
6. I understand that the hotspots, iPads, and laptops are freely accessible and may be unsecure when connected to the Internet.
7. I understand that Whitefish Community Library, its officials, and employees are not responsible for any files, data, confidential or personal information accessed, transmitted, lost, or damaged as a result of using the WCL devices.
8. The library does its best to provide clean, secure, and fully functional equipment, and is not responsible for charging the device or for any unforeseen hardware or software failure.
9. Staff makes every effort to document existing damage. If a borrower discovers pre-existing damage, the borrower should notify library staff as soon as possible. Failure to notify library staff of existing damage limits the borrower's ability to dispute charges for damage discovered upon the device's return.
10. The borrower acknowledges and agrees not to hold Whitefish Community Library responsible for any personal injury, inconvenience, or expense incurred because of library equipment.
11. **OVERDUE HOTSPOTS**—Because data charges exist for hotspot usage, when a hotspot is more than a week overdue, WCL will contact Verizon to suspend data to the overdue hotspot. **If data is suspended on a hotspot due to borrower not returning on time, the borrower will be blocked from checking out any WCL device for 30 days after return of the hotspot. On the second instance of suspending data to a hotspot, patron will be blocked from checking out any WCL device for 60 days. On the third instance, borrower will no longer have privileges to check out WCL devices including hotspots, laptops, or iPads. Unreturned devices will be charged a replacement fee.**

By signing this user agreement, I acknowledge that I have read the above terms and conditions and agree to abide by them. If I do not abide by these terms and conditions, I acknowledge that my checkout privileges may be revoked.

_____ staff initial _____
SIGNATURE AND DATE

Last name: _____ date signed (mon/Yr) _____