



# Lake County: A Newcomer's Starter Pack

### About the Tribe

“The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes are the largest employer in Lake County with 1,200 employees serving a dozen departments that tend to natural resources, forests, lands, water and air quality along with law enforcement, tribal health and housing services. Of the 8,087 enrolled tribal members, approximately 5,380 live on the reservation. The Tribal Government is directed by a 10-member council of elected officials. The Tribal Headquarters are based in Pablo, with the tribal offices spread across the reservation” – CSKT’s *A People of Vision*.

James Madison, father of the Constitution, urged Americans to “Extend the Sphere.” He believed that incorporating as much diversity as possible into the United States was the best way to preserve freedom. The diversity in Lake County is what makes it so special. The Salish and Kootenai Tribes add a level of diversity to Lake County that triumphs all others. Our schools teach Native American history (and sovereignty) side by side with the functions of the United States’ Government. Students dream of becoming US Congressmen alongside with those who dream of becoming members of the Tribal Council. Whichever path, the answer is clear: diving into the diversity of Lake County is one the most educating experiences ever. Take pride in our county and the tribe equally. Research the ways that both the tribe and county work upon moving here. Doing so will not only make you happier, but will help the entire community work together as a cohesive unit.

**US Senators:** Jon Tester  
Steve Daines

**Representative:** Matt Rosendale

**Lake County Commissioners:** Bill Barron– District 1  
Steve Stanley– District 2  
Gale Decker– District 3

### LAKE COUNTY:

**Population:** 31,134  
**Median Housing Value:** \$625,000  
**Median Household Income:** \$48,829

\*Taken from 2020 Census

\* This pamphlet was written in 2019 by Davis Smith in conjunction with the Commissioners of Lake County. Davis is a junior at Polson High School and has been doing community service & intern work for the Commissioners. Thanks to all for reading this pamphlet. Call the Commissioners if you have any questions!

## Phone Numbers

### Lake County:

Cemetery	883 4777
County Commissioners	883 7204
Election	883 7268
Emergency Management	883 7253
Environmental Health	883 7236
GIS Addressing	883 7212
Planning	883 7235
Plat/Survey	883 7213
Public Health	883 7288
Roads	883 7206
Search and Rescue	883 7337
Sheriff	883 7279
Solid Waste	883 7323
Superintendent of Schools	883 7262
Taxes	883 7224
Weed Dept.	883 7330
WIC	883 7307
Conservation District	676 2842
Extension (4-H)	676 4271
Tribal Lands Dept.	275-2730

Welcome to Lake County, Montana. If you are just moving here you may find differences in the way public services are provided than where you come from. The County encompasses 1,490 square miles and has a population of approximately 30,000 people. This is bolstered by up to 10,000 tourists in the summer time.

Much of Lake County, along with three other counties, overlaps the Flathead Indian Reservation. With three incorporated towns this results in a confusing pattern of jurisdiction. Our county consists of tribal, state, federal, private, and public land. This pamphlet is to give a brief overview on what could be hundreds of pages on this issue.

The Commissioners' goal is to keep you informed on the jurisdiction that will affect your life in Lake County while keeping the Wild West wilder than ever. From dirt roads to paved highways, open fields filled with grazing cattle to concrete towns, and miles of Native American land side by side with State and Federal land, making the Wild West run smoothly is synonymous to the voyages of western settlers: difficult, lengthy, and with much dedication. However, once the deed is done, life will never be better.

## Roads and Access

1.1 It is impossible to predict the response times of our emergency services. Certain circumstances, beyond the control of emergency services, will cause emergency services to be extremely slow. Our law enforcement per capita ratio is excellent, however we don't have many officers per square mile. This may make response times slower.

1.2 If access to your property runs over someone else's property, problems can arise. It is important to check to see if easements may be necessary for access to your property.

1.3 Lake County is home to hundreds of bridges, paved roads, dirt roads, and gravelled roads. Not all public roads are maintained (meaning grading and snow removal). Check with the County Road and Bridge Office to determine the status of a specific road.

1.4 Lake County is home to extreme weather all year-round, which can destroy bridges and roads. Annual road maintenance is expected. Special equipment may need to be rented or bought to maintain roads.

1.5 Large construction vehicles may not be able to access your property if roads are too narrow. It is wise to research what vehicles are capable of accessing your property. Also, rural homes may cost more to build as delivery costs increase over distance.

1.6 School buses only pickup students on maintained public roads designated by the school district. Children may need to be driven to bus stops; private roads must be maintained to allow children access to the bus.

1.7 In certain weather, county roads may be not be navigable. Four-wheel drive may be necessary along with chains. Some roads may take up to 72 hours to be cleared. Roads get narrower with snow. Yielding the right of way isn't only a legal matter, it is a safety matter. Special driving skills need to be learned in rural areas. Driving off road to detour bad roads may make a section worse, ruining road banks and increasing erosion.

1.8 Don't expect everyone to join a petition for road services. Rural counties rely on volunteerism and personal work to help maintain roads and lower costs. Residents may also like poor roads to help restrict access to their house, improving privacy.

## CODE OF THE WEST

Credit of these codes must be directed toward Gallatin County's *Code of the West*

1. Appreciate the splendor of Montana's natural beauty, the opportunity to live here, and the quality of life we enjoy.
2. Be a good steward of the land, take personal responsibility for keeping our land weed and trash free, and promote recycling.
3. Show respect for our state and local laws, for wildlife, for the land and for the people, especially those engaged in farming and ranching.
4. Be goodwill ambassadors, showing friendliness to visitors and neighbors alike.
5. Take pride in how we maintain our property, our business, our communities, and ourselves.
6. Become informed about how things are done in our communities and in the state, so that we fully understand the realities of living in rural Montana.
7. Take political action: read, vote, become informed, and participate when necessary to preserve and improve the good things we have.
8. Get involved with our communities to give back all that we receive.
9. Work together for the greater good of the whole neighborhood, community, county, state, nation, and the world.

## Conclusion

Whether a tragedy or great practicality, the West is becoming more and more modernized. It is imperative for all inhabitants of the West to know how we function, and the basic rules needed to make life pleasant. As you settle down in Lake County, take a moment to reflect on your views of the West and how to preserve those views.

We hope you enjoyed this pamphlet. It is not meant to be a complete book on everything, rather a short introduction to our area and the customs here. Any more detailed questions you may have, a good place to start is your local court house and the commissioner's office. They will help direct you in the right direction.

Service is what makes Lake County the great place it is today. A great way to ease your transition here, and meet people and friends while doing so, is to serve the community. We have numerous volunteer boards and openings are usually plentiful. Help make your mark on the West, and help us keep the Wild West as wild as possible. Thanks to all.

-Lake County-

1.9 Natural disasters can ruin roads. Lake County will repair and maintain public roads, but subdivision and private roads are the owner's responsibility. Residents living near private roads and bridges may have LARGE bills for repairs.

1.10 Unpaved roads mean lots of dust will occur in dry seasons. Dust is unpleasant and may cause health issues. Take note of this.

1.11 If your road is unpaved it is highly unlikely that Lake County will pave it in the near future. Check with the county if the seller of a property indicates that unpaved roads will be paved!

1.12 Unpaved roads "washboard" when dry and dusty and become slippery and muddy when wet. This will increase vehicle maintenance costs.

1.13 Speedy services in urban areas (mail and delivery) may be slower in rural areas.

1.14 Have your address visible at the driveway entrance for all services.

1.15 County snowplows might block your driveway with snow. It is illegal to remove snow from your property onto a County right-of-way. Find another spot!

1.16 If your property is not on a fire district you may want to consider getting on one so that your insurance premiums aren't as high. Fire districts can be expanded to your home if you are contiguous.

## Utility Services

2.0 Any services (water, electric, natural gas, cable, etc.) may not be available or up to par with urban standards. Expect delays.

2.1 Telephone communication may not work, especially in mountain areas. Cell phones may not work everywhere.

2.2 Sewer service is generally available only in municipalities. You need an approved septic system or other treatment process. Soil type, depth to ground water, streams, and slope help determine costs and function of such systems. Contact Lake County Environmental Health Department for requirements.

2.4 Electricity is not available to all parts of Lake County. It can be expensive to extend power lines.

2.5 Proper utility easements are essential. Be sure to know where your utilities come from and if easements are needed.

2.6 Electric power in single phase is standard, but a three-phase service configuration comes at a premium and is not available everywhere. If you have special power needs, it is important to know what level of service can be provided to your property.

2.7 Electric services usually require a one-time hook-up fee and then monthly bills. You should know both costs before purchasing property.

2.8 Power outages are inevitable. Be prepared. An outage can turn off a well pump, freezer, heat source, electronics, etc. Make sure you have supplies to survive a week without power.

2.9 Trash removal may be inconvenient, but you cannot burn or bury your own trash even on your property. It is important to know trash and recycling rules. Animal-proof refuse containers are a good idea. Some zoning districts require animal-proof containers. Bird feeders, etc. are not recommended as they disrupt natural wildlife. Contact Lake County Environmental Health Dept. & Planning Dept. for more info.

### **The Property**

3.0 Rural property requires proper maintenance. Continual stewardship is needed with rural life. You should know what elements can affect your property before buying it.

3.1 Encroachment permits are required for access onto county-maintained roads. A proposed driveway may conflict with safety and traffic flow. Check with the Road Department about such issues before buying land. Existing easements, which may not be recorded, may allow you to permit construction of roads, power lines, etc. on your property. Check for any easements on your property.

3.2 Often times you will not own the mineral rights to your property. This means that the subsurface owner can alter the surface to extract minerals. You should know the minerals below your land and who owns them. Adjacent mines can expand and have negative impacts on your property.

5.9 Moving to the country is not a license to let pets roam. Gentle dogs can become a deer-chasing nuisance, predator of small game, or lunch for coyotes. State law protects livestock from your dogs. Dogs found attacking or harassing livestock can be shot.

5.10 Cattle drives frequent Lake County and may occur on streets or roads. Use common sense and slow down if you happen upon one. Be respectful of those living off the land.

### **Invasive Species**

6.0 One reason you moved here probably had to do with the beauty of Flathead Lake. Being the largest freshwater lake west of the Mississippi, we pride on how clean and pure Flathead Lake is. Help keep Flathead Lake the way it is today. Be sure to wash boats completely off before putting them in any body of water. Stop at all checkpoints on the roads that will check to make sure your boat is clean for use. Contact the Lake County Commissioners Office for more information.

### **Public Land**

7.0 Montanans love their public lands. We not only use these lands to hunt and fish, but we use them to gain a better connection with the area. It is important that you respect these public lands and do not abuse them. Do not litter or ruin public lands. Know that most bodies of water are PUBLIC lands in Montana.

### **Education**

8.0 The Salish-Kootenai College is a local, Native American based community college. It is located in Pablo and lies on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Though not limited to Tribal Members, the college plays a large role in tribal education. Bachelor degree programs, associate degree programs, and six certificate programs are available at SKC. Go to [www.skcedu](http://www.skcedu) for more information.

8.1 "Lake County has eight public school districts. Three are K-8 elementary and five are K-12 districts. We also have Tribal options: P-8<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>, Two Eagle River School, Nkwusm (Salish Immersion School), and the Salish and Kootenai College which includes non-tribal students. Our pre-schools are found throughout the county and include the Head Start programs. Private school options vary, with two K-12 schools and several K-8 schools. These include Christian, Seventh Day Adventist, Mennonite, and Amish schools. More information can be found at: [www.lakemt.gov/school/school.html](http://www.lakemt.gov/school/school.html)" – Carolyn Hall, Lake County Superintendent of Schools

## **AGRICULTURE**

### **Farming is huge in Lake County. Please note:**

5.0 Farmers work around the clock, especially during planting and harvest time. Many activities are done at night. This may disturb the peace. Take this into consideration if buying property with nearby farms.

5.1 DUST is a major product of farming, especially during wind or drought.

5.2 Farmers occasionally burn their ditches and fields to clean debris and weeds. This may cause smoke you find objectionable.

5.3 Chemicals (fertilizers and herbicides) are often used in farming. You may be sensitive to these products or have severe allergic reactions. Many chemicals are applied via crop dusters (planes) early in the morning.

5.4 Animal manure can, and will, cause “objectionable” smells. Oh well! Take this into consideration if living near farms!

5.5 Do not expect government to intervene in normal day-to-day activities with neighboring farms. In fact, Lake County farmers have the “Right to Farm,” legislation that protects farmers from nuisance and liability laws.

5.6 Montana has open range law. This means YOU must fence your property off if you don't want livestock on it. It's not the rancher's job. However, Lake County does have HERD DISTRICTS where you do need to control your livestock. Find out if your land is on open range or herd district policy.

5.7 Animals (bulls, stallions, rams, boar, buffalo, etc.) can attack humans. Children must be taught to not enter animal pens. Dangerous wildlife may frequent urban areas.

5.8 We tend to have long dry seasons in Lake County, and therefore dust is an issue. Irrigation cannot cover all grasslands. Land can only support a certain number of animals. Overdoing land usage can cause dust and it can work the land dry. This can be very expensive to fix and harmful to the environment. Contact Lake County Extension Office for more info.

3.3 You may have received a plat of your property. This may not be accurate unless pins are placed by a licensed surveyor.

3.4 Fences and outbuildings often straddle property lines. A survey is the only way to confirm the location of your property lines.

3.5 Subdivisions and planned unit housing have covenants or deed restrictions. You should know if any of these exist before buying a property. Lack of covenants (or not enforcing existing ones) may cause problems between neighbors.

3.6 Property owner associations are required to maintain systems like roads, snow removal, weeds, etc. A dysfunctional association or poor covenants can cause problems and create expensive litigation.

3.7 Know any dues needed by any property owner associations. Check their bylaws for this info.

3.8 Open fields and pastures will probably not remain so forever. Lake County Planning Department can tell you if a property is zoned and if development plans exist. The view you have may change if such elements are present.

3.9 Land use permits may be required and certain uses may be restricted if land is zoned. Check with the Planning Department zoning restrictions.

3.10 Your new home site is important because it is a permanent location. New arrivals often build atop ridges or hills. This can come with many disadvantages. Weather and exposure can destroy such homes. Access and obtaining water can present issues as well. Plus, such a site can spoil everyone else's view.

3.11 Understanding the soil and its limitations can be very useful. Soil properties affect a site's susceptibility to erosion and help identify areas classified as wetlands. Soil types can determine appropriate building and road locations, septic systems, crop or hay production, and landscaping. The Natural Resources and Conservation Office will have information on soils.

3.12 Lake County citizens are legally required to control noxious weeds. Lake County Weed District Coordinator can help identify noxious weeds and devise a plan.

3.13 If you have a ditch on your property, the ditch owners have the right to access your property to obtain the water and maintain the ditch.

3.14 Water rights sold with a property may not give you the right to use water from ditches crossing your land without the consent of the owner. Other users may have senior rights to the water that can limit your use or require you to pay for oversizing or other ditch improvements.

3.15 Know if your water rights will supply you with enough water for whatever you will do with your land.

3.16 Water in irrigation ditches belongs to someone. You may not have rights to this water.

3.17 The people of Montana own natural bodies of water. To protect our waterways, permits are typically required prior to any alterations. Please contact the appropriate Conservation District for requirements.

3.18 Any body of water can be a hazard. If you live near water consider the danger it has on your family. Ditch owners are not responsible for any injury. Water levels may change rapidly.

3.19 Irrigational ditches can raise ground water levels. Be sure to check if there is a seasonal ground water fluctuation that may affect your basement or well.

3.20 Lake County cherishes the world-famous fisheries it possesses, and they are crucial to our economy. Many new citizens want to establish their own fishery via private pond. This can cause many severe issues to the environment if not done right. Contact Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks or Tribal Shoreline for permitting requirements.

### **Environment**

4.0 The physical aspects of your property can be good and bad. Trees are aesthetically great, but they can also fuel forest fires. Building at the top of a forested draw can be VERY dangerous. Grassland fires are not uncommon. Defensible fire perimeters not only protect your house from wild or grassland fires, but can also protect the LAND if your house catches on fire.

4.1 Steep slopes can slide in warm weather. Large rocks can slide down these slopes, creating potential danger.

4.2 North-facing slopes hardly receive sun. Snow may not melt until late in the year on these areas. Please note that it snows all year in the Rockies.

4.3 Land topography can tell you where water flows. Sometimes land owners fill a ravine only to find water running through their home during the next storm season.

4.4 Sandbags can be used to prevent flooding. Lake County may not be able to provide sand bags, equipment, or people to protect private property from flooding.

4.5 Flash floods can occur in the summer and spring run-off, turning a dry dusty gully into a roaring river, or a field into a lake. You should consider this. Portions of Lake County are noted for their flood potential and either restrict or prohibit buildings. Check with Lake County Planning Dept. for more info.

4.6 Lake County is home to many animals. These animals can eat your garden dry or run onto the roads. Learn how to coexist with these animals. Call Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, or Lake County Extension Office for more info.

4.7 Rural development occurs on the habitat of wild animals. Some of these animals (bears, rattlesnakes, mountain lions, etc.) can be dangerous. Respect these animals. Watch from a distance.

4.8 Horse flies and mosquitos can ruin a romantic picnic. As painful as bugs these can be, more harm occurs when spray used to prevent these bugs negatively impacts frogs, birds, and native plants. If you use these sprays, be aware of your surroundings. TREAD LIGHTLY. Save our lands.

4.9 Weather has its own mood in Montana. It fluctuates constantly. It may not be the heat, but the length of the dry season that can get to you. Some (generally) accurate averages of Lake County's temperature are given below.

*July Average High: 84F*

*January Average High: 34°F*

*July Average Low: 53°F*

*January Average Low: 22°F*

4.10 Lake County lies on the Mission Fault. We are seismically active, and have the potential for a SEVERE earthquake. Check with US Geologic Service (USGS), Montana Dept. of Commerce, and Building Codes Division for more info.

4.11 We understand you may be moving here to hike, ski, bike, or ride horses throughout the land. Understand that many public lands are shut down at certain times for safety reasons. To access tribal lands YOU NEED A TRIBAL PERMIT (contact Tribal Fish, Wildlife and Parks for more information), and you need the consent of the owner if you wish to use private lands. Research the areas you wish to hike BEFORE committing to the hike to see if any issues arise.