

Billboard Control CASE STUDY
Montana Activists Clamp Down on Billboard Blight



Three groups in Montana found strength in numbers by forming a coalition, SAVE Scenic Montana. The coalition succeeded in getting a state law enacted in 1995 that significantly reduces billboard blight in Montana. The law limits billboard height to 30 feet (previously unlimited); limits size to 672 sq. feet (down from 1200 sq. feet); requires billboards to be on the same side of the road as the business that qualifies the area as unzoned commercial or industrial, with a limit of two billboards in these qualifying areas; and requires that the permit fee cover the cost of administering the program.

SAVE Scenic Montana did their homework, researching the laws of other states, and contacting state DOTs and Scenic America for information. The coalition worked with media to educate the public and put the issue on the political radar screen. The coalition also maintained an active presence in Helena, keeping the pressure on their legislators, and worked hard to inform the governor of the problems associated with billboards. As a result, the Governor formed a task force that ultimately helped force the passage of the bill.

After their win, the activists developed the following list of goals: 1) improve billboard control; 2) start a state scenic byways program; and 3) set up advertising kiosks along Montana highways to give local businesses a less-obtrusive form of advertising.