

Theme 5: Industrial

From the first people through the ages, the Upper Missouri River and its tributaries have supported and powered industry.

Subthemes:

1. The ford in the Upper Missouri at Great Falls created a crossing for bison and the banks became a meat processing site for many tribes. Native Americans have used bedrock, such as hornfels, and glacial gravels found in this region to make flaked and ground stone tools.
2. The Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery created the written record of the Upper Missouri Region. Their words became the first “walking brochure” or “economic marketing piece” for what was to become the Montana Territory.
3. From reading the LC journals, 75 years later Paris Gibson was encouraged to visit the site whereby he immediately recognized the potential for industrial development. Great Falls was built on a grid, using the natural curve of the Missouri River to define its transportation routes used for later industrial transport.
4. Gibson had the foresight to visualize Great Falls as an industrial mega-power; he established the Great Falls Townsite and Electric Company that built the first dam on the Missouri River (Black Eagle).
5. Railroad transportation routing made industrial development possible – regional coal and hard rock mineral mining thrived as transportation routes expanded. Shonkinite, a volcanic potassic feldspar found in the Highwood, Little Belt, Adel and Bears Paw Mountains, has been used for building and dam construction since the early twentieth century.
6. An early 19th century newspaper headline said: Great Falls, the city of wind, water and future (Future Great was another commonly used moniker for Great Falls).
7. Timing was serendipitous. In 1882, while Paris Gibson planned for water power, Marcus Daley discovered copper in Butte and Thomas Edison flipped the switch on the first public electric lighting in NYC creating the flurry for widespread electrical power. The stars aligned to make it possible for Great Falls to ultimately “wire the world.”
8. Great Falls developed the electrical power to initially smelt Butte’s copper and regional minerals; and then later became the “powerhouse” to refine and produce wire, cable, ball bearings and more. This industry helped Great Falls grow exponentially.

9. By 1920, the Anaconda Company at Black Eagle was also the largest zinc plant in the world and produced half of the world's zinc.
10. John Ryan rose to become chairman of the Anaconda Company; and he created the Montana Power Company in the early 1910s. A unique system of five dams built on the Missouri River, dropping water 500 vertical feet within 20 miles, has been a continuous and renewable source of electricity.
11. Rainbow Powerhouse provided the energy to build Fort Peck Dam.
12. The first flour mill in the Great Falls area was the Cataract Mill built in 1884. The Golden Triangle continues to produce quality grains that have spurred the development of numerous mills and agricultural manufacturing facilities (pasta, malting, biofuels, and heritage grains). The region remains a national leader in agricultural production from hard red winter wheat to malt barley.
13. Access to petroleum and transportation routes along the Missouri River spurred the development of oil refineries in the region.
14. The Sun River irrigation system, which watered vast agricultural production on the plains, was one of the most unique engineering feats in the country, at the time.
15. As the region transitioned from bison to beef, cattle herds in the tens of thousands roamed the open range, followed by herds of sheep in the thousands.
16. Tourism is a modern growth industry in the Upper Missouri River region, as recreation seekers discover the majesty of the rolling, unfenced plains, clear streams, and island mountain ranges.