

## Montanans are ready for “Yellowstone” to end



### The hit series brought Montana to the masses—and the masses to Montana

TAYLOR SHERIDAN’S Montana is a place where ranchers fight militias, divert rivers with dynamite, run for governor in their spare time and commit murder (although they prefer driving to Wyoming to do so). Mr Sheridan is the creator of “Yellowstone”, a television drama that premiered in 2018 about the Dutton family and the lengths they will go to in order to hold on to their immense ranch. John Dutton, played by a tanned and leathery-looking Kevin Costner, is the family patriarch and godfather of the Rockies, hellbent on keeping Montana free of new housing developments and New Yorkers on holiday. “I am the opposite of progress,” he growls, when announcing his campaign for governor. “I am the wall it bashes against.”

The last time “Yellowstone” was on air, in the 2022-23 season, it was the most-watched show in America, averaging nearly 12m viewers a week. But its reign is coming to an end. The second half of its fifth and probably final season will premiere on November 10th on the Paramount Network. The cast will be without Mr Costner, who left the franchise to work on his own Western film project (a feud with Mr Sheridan may have played a part).

Fans sorry to see the series end will be heartened by the fact that Mr Sheridan has created a kind of cowboy cinematic universe, with two “Yellowstone” prequels (“1883” and “1923”) already out and another drama set in Montana (“The Madison”, starring Michelle Pfeiffer) in the works. Yet one group is especially looking forward to the finale: actual Montanans.

When your correspondent asked Montanans what they think about the show, the same idea came up repeatedly: that the series often applies a mythical or outdated view of the Wild West to modern Montana. “It feels like it portrays us as cowpokes waiting for Kevin Costner to come tell us what to do,” says Joe Hancock, a financial analyst in Bozeman.

Others think the storylines lack complexity. Pat Flowers, a Democrat in the state Senate, offers a very Montanan example: “Everybody’s got mixed feelings about grizzly bears. But in ‘Yellowstone’, you got bear-haters and bear-lovers.”

Even if the show is a bit reductionist, it often touches on issues that loom large in the state. Chief among them is growth. One of Montana’s nicknames is “the last best place”, a mountainous Eden forgotten by modernity. But from 2020 through 2023 Montana’s population grew faster than that of all but four other states. Local Democrats and Republicans alike talk about “defending Montana values”. Among John Dutton’s enemies are Wall Street investors sniffing out development projects.

Montana’s resistance to growth is a plot line in “Yellowstone”, but many Montanans argue that the show has turbocharged the problem. “The growth we’ve seen is in large part through the popularity of the show ‘Yellowstone’,” Greg Gianforte, the state’s Republican governor, told The Economist last year. “The scenery is legit,” he added, “maybe not the drama.” (Mr Gianforte was once humorously introduced as “John Dutton” at an event.)

Laurie Bishop lives in Park County, which includes Paradise Valley, home to the Dutton family’s fictional ranch. She says tourists and newcomers to the state are easy to spot because they are “playing dress-up”. “It was not until the last few years with ‘Yellowstone’ that I found myself surrounded by so many people wearing cowboy hats and boots,” she says, laughing. She does not count herself as a fan of the show. “I just can’t do it,” she says, raising an eyebrow.

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