

How Do Mail Ballot Elections Work?

On August 6, 2020 Governor Steve Bullock issued a Directive granting Montana counties the authority to conduct the upcoming election by all-mail ballot. The Directive states that any County conducting an all-mail ballot election must provide for in-person voting October 2, 2020 through November 3, 2020 Election Day at 8pm. In Person Voting will be available in our office during that time frame.

People across the nation and in Montana are wondering *How Do Mail Ballots Work?*

All counties Election Offices in Montana, including Park County, are very used to preparing and conducting all-mail ballot elections. Montanans have been casting Absentee Ballots for many years, even when polling places are open. More than 50% of Park County residents are already signed up for Absentee or Mail Ballots.

There are laws and procedures in place that account for every ballot issued, received and counted. These processes also ensure that every person's ballot is secret. Most importantly, these processes are open to public observation.

A voter record is created whenever someone registers to vote in Montana. Every Montana Voter Application is scanned into the voter record, including the Voter's signature.

In an All-Mail Ballot Election all Active Voters will be sent a ballot. The packet sent will include voting instructions, the ballot, a secrecy envelope and a return affirmation envelope that must be signed by the Voter.

The instructions include the steps to vote the ballot and place it in the secrecy envelope, then the secrecy envelope will go into the affirmation envelope that must be signed. Completed ballot packages may be mailed back, postage paid by the State, or dropped off at the Election Office 414 E Callender St in Livingston. The ballot packet must be received in our office by November 3, 2020 at 8pm.

Our goal in Park County is to process every incoming ballot the day it is received by mail or ballot box. You can track your ballot by going to <https://app.mt.gov/voterinfo/> or from a link on our county webpage <https://www.parkcounty.org/Government-Departments/Elections/CURRENT-ELECTIONS/> then click on the My Voter Page graphic.

When we receive a ballot we check the signature on the return envelope to the signature we scanned in when the voter registered to vote. If the signature is missing or does not match, the voter will be contacted to produce identification and complete a form so we have a matching signature for the voter record.

The ballot tracking process:



Returned ballots are tracked in the same election software that contains Voter Records. After reviewing signatures on batches of ballots they are accepted into the system. The ballots are then locked away in Precinct batches with a report confirming the number of ballots in each batch. This process is repeated continuously throughout election season and election day.

Per Montana law on the Thursday before Election Day an Absentee Board is impaneled to begin opening the envelopes. There are two boards of three members that count the ballots, open the affirmation envelopes, count the secrecy envelopes and open and remove the ballots. The boards switch jobs after the secrecy envelope is removed from the affirmation envelope, so they never know which ballot came from which affirmation envelope, and all votes remain secret. The ballots are never alone and are locked up as soon as they have been removed from the secrecy envelopes. This process can be observed by the public, but the

public is not allowed to leave during the process which continues throughout the day. The Absentee Board can also work Friday, Monday and will work Tuesday, Election Day.

At the start of Election Day the DS-450 Tabulating Machine begins to count votes on the ballots. If a ballot is rejected from the machine for any reason, there is a Resolution Board that reviews the ballot to try to determine a voter's intent and prepare a replacement ballot so the votes will be counted.

This process continues until all ballots are processed and results are available. The Tabulating Machine is not connected to the internet and the Election Administrator is the only one with access to the results until they are available to the public.

Our office works diligently to make sure that every ballot packet returned is counted, processed, opened correctly and that each Electors votes are counted without anyone knowing how a specific person votes. We also make the Absentee Board, Tabulating Board, and Resolution Board available for public observation.