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SHOWN IS THE APRIL 2008 issue of Outdoor Life magazine, which calls Dillon the eighth best town in the country for hunting and fishing in a total of 200 places.

Secret's out

Dillon ranks in hunting, fishing

Town makes magazine's Top 10 list; Butte at No. 30

By NICK GEVOCK
of The Montana Standard

DILLON — Kim McLaughlin hunted and fished around here for two decades before he finally got the itch to move to this outdoors paradise.

"That's why I came here," McLaughlin, who moved to Dillon three years ago, said recently of hunting and fishing around Dillon. "It's a great area."

McLaughlin packed up from his home in Oregon, where he earned his living in the timber industry, and made the move to Dillon. He bought Uncle Bob's Outdoors and has grown the business to include more gear.

It turns out that McLaughlin isn't the only one who's noted the incredible opportunities for hunters and anglers in southwest Montana.

Outdoor Life magazine in an article titled "Paradise Found" recently named Dillon the eighth best town in the country for hunting and fishing in a total ranking of the top 200 communities nationwide.

Writer Andrew McKean noted that Dillon is surrounded with "public-land elk sharing space with moose, mule deer, mountain goats and bighorn sheep."

And the Beaverhead River and other area fisheries make up some of the best trout fishing in the West, the magazine touted.

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Dillon ...

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It's hardly a secret that Dillonites have long enjoyed excellent hunting and fishing. But now it's been branded by one of the larger hook and bullet magazines in the country.

Yet Dillon wasn't the only town in the Treasure State to make the list. In fact, it didn't even rank the highest.

Outdoor Life pegged Lewistown as the sixth best, Livingston is ranked 13 and Helena came in ranked 16. The four Montana towns in the top 20 were more than for any other state.

Butte also made the list with a ranking of 30.

The article said in looking at towns with a population of 4,000 or larger, it factored in quality of life measures including housing prices, median household income and commute time. Then it took into account the sporting opportunities such as trophy potential, access to public land and whether hunting and fishing is possible year round.

The sporting opportunities were given a higher emphasis when the measures were fed into a database to get the ranking, the magazine said.

The ranking was not a surprise to Bill Forrester, owner of Carriage House Realty and a Dillon native. He said in recent years about half of his sales to out-of-state residents have been to people who've said they're coming to Dillon to hunt and fish.

"It definitely has been a driving factor in the real estate market for the last five to 10 years," he said.

Most of those people have sold a home for a substantial price somewhere else and then buy in Dillon. Forrester said he's seen retirees, as well as people in their late 40s and 50s who bring their jobs with them and telecommute.

McLaughlin said although he agrees the hunting and fishing around Dillon are incredible, one part of the article made him laugh. It stated that people "Move here for the elk hunting,

stay for the affordable housing and thriving high-tech economy."

He said he's not aware of high-tech jobs in computers or other fields in Dillon at all. And that explains why most of the people who do move to Dillon from elsewhere are older because good paying jobs are hard to come by.

"You better bring your money with you," he said.