**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**July 18, 2024 – 12:30 pm**

**Beartooth RC&D Conference Room**

**Luncheon with Meeting to Follow**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Gina Schaible, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Tina Toyne, City of Hardin Economic Development Director

Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County Planning / Economic Development

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Martin DeWitt, Small Business Administration

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Tory Kolkhorst, Senator Daines’ Office

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County

Bob VanOosten, Stillwater Conservation District

Brent Moore, City of Red Lodge

Bonnie Gray, Town of Joliet

Jeff McDowell, Two Rivers Authority

Randy Weimer, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine

Danny Choriki, Ubet Post

Kerri Crowe, Dept. of Business and Labor

Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District

**Meeting Called to Order:** Ryan Van Ballegooyen called the meeting to order.

**Pledge of Allegiance, Introduction of Members and Guests**

**Review May Board Minutes (Action): Melanie motioned to approve the minutes. Stephanie seconded. Motion passed.**

**Congressional Updates:**

**Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines’ Rep:**

* Sen, Daines signed a bi-partisan letter to increase efforts in protecting crops from potato wart disease.
* Trump assassination attempt – Senator is calling for Head of Secret Service Kim Cheatle to step down.
* Delisting of Grizzly bear – 5 months past review deadline. Dept of Interior has shown it’s not a priority. Senator Daines continues to urge them to delist and follow the science.
* Senate Central Asian Caucus – focus is on strengthening relationship with allies, increasing trade and investment, and supporting regional stability in Central Asia.
* Introducing bill to protect MT Service workers and not tax tips.
* Sen. Daines and colleagues introduced a bi-partisan bill to support tribal communities’ travel across the U.S.-Canada border.
* Senator is fighting policies preventing veteran access to health care.
* Announced landmark funding for MT Headwaters Hub, which will strengthen our technology.

**Treasurer / Financial Reports (Nan absent)**

1. **Treasurer Update**
2. **RC&D Financials**
3. **RLF Financials**

Joel: Implementing new financial software. That’s why the current financial reports aren’t available.

**NO ACTION NEEDED.**

**New Staff Member**

* Gina Schaible – new Community Coordinator
* Gaurav Thakur – we were very impressed with Gaurav’s interview & he has accepted our job offer. He is Canadian, so there are some extra hoops to jump through in getting his TN Visa and a few other details, but we are all excited to work with him.
  + Tory Kolkhorst mentioned that Sen. Daines’ office can help us with the process.

**Review of Strategic Business Plan**

* Not an action item. Staff is working on with the Executive Committee. If you have any questions or suggestions, let us know and we will make revisions. Once we have all comments, we will create a final draft and present to the board for approval.
* Joel will be working through other documents to update them.
* This will be used as an orientation for new board members as well.

**Signature Certification for USDA – Nan and Myrna**

* Nan and Myrna would both like signature approval for the USDA programs they oversee to be able to sign documents if Joel is not available. The final say on all documents is the point person at USDA, so if there is anything wrong, they will catch it.
* **Danny Choriki moved to move forward with signature certification for USDA for both Nan and Myrna. Jeff McDowell seconded. Motion carried.**

**City of Hardin Board Member Appointment**

* The City of Hardin has requested that Tina Toyne serve as their Beartooth board member.
* **Melanie motioned to approve Tina as City of Hardin board rep. Scott Miller seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program / Project Updates**

**Food and Ag Program - Joel Bertolino**

* Abbreviated meeting. See his report in the board materials and just let Joel know if you have any questions.

**RLF – Nan Knight**

* Nan was out of town, but Myrna mentioned that we received the $500,000 Big Sky Economic Development RLF award. We put it up as match to strengthen our $750,000 IRP application, and we haven’t gotten official word yet, but our USDA rep told us it was the highest scoring application in the nation. So we are feeling very hopeful!
* Myrna also gave a little info on Nan’s work with Brownfields:
  + Nan will be touring Brownfield sites next week with EPA rep Phylicia Allen.
  + Presented to the Red Lodge Workforce Housing Steering Committee in June & hoping to do an assessment on the old hospital there.
  + Western Motel in Hardin is another one, and we are meeting with LeBeau-Simone next week.
  + Nan and Myrna don’t really have the time, but we feel we need to apply for the Brownfield RLF funding that would enable us to loan and grant funds to property owners for cleanup. We hate saying, “You have all these problems, but sorry, we can’t help you.” So that is likely on the near horizon.

**Economic Development / CRDC – Report in board materials**

**Operations Support – Myrna Lastusky**

* RCDIs both going well.
* Many hours assisting a REAP client in Fromberg.
* Joel, Gina and Myrna met with King’s Cupboard after a tour to discuss their needs and are helping them with a REAP application and possible other grants.

**Community Coordinator – Gina Schaible**

* RCAC Community Coordinator
* ROCE Steering Committee – they help to recruit the community members to come to the workshop.
* Workshops will start in September – 4 workshops, one per month
* Next step is to finalize the flyers we will get out to the community
* Nan and Gina will attend the Farmers market in Columbus on Aug. 1st to help spread the word.

**Joel offered to answer questions on any of Beartooth’s activities and programs:**

* Joel provided a brief history of RC&Ds and how Beartooth began (originally with NRCS). In 1995 began the non-profit arm.
* May 2010 moved on to Main Street away from the NRCS building.
* CRDC and EDA pair well together. They have match money from our MOUs we do with the counties and cities in our region.
* In 2003 applied for Ag Innovation Center Federal Funding Through State
  + Joel came on in 2007 and in 2010 the State decided to permanently fund the Food and Ag Development Centers.
* RLF:
  + WE have an existing IRP; applied for another one recently.
  + CDBG
  + RMAP – microloans ($50K or less) for microbusinesses (10 employees or less).
  + Also have occasional short-term funding
    - Brownfields
    - Brownfields EJ Grant
    - Myrna was hired with EDA CARES grant funding (3-year grant)
    - Gina was hired with RCAC grant money (3-year grant)
    - RCDIs – another example of short-term funding
  + Joel gave more in-depth info on Brownfields and how it works
  + Good discussion on how prevalent brownfields are and how much need there is for assessments and cleanups.
* Don asked what kind of money comes from the State?
  + CRDC - $82,000
  + FADC - $60,000
  + Specialty Crop Block Grant (federal money that comes from the State) - $40,000 to serve specialty crop producers
  + Farm to School (USDA grant) - $3300/year
  + REAP – we get paid for TA to promote and assist in writing applications. That will change b/c they are hiring 2 specialists in October.
  + RFSI (Rural Food Systems Infrastructure) – for supply chains. The State uses FADC’s to promote and refer clients to funding opportunities. They had 2 big funding opportunities earlier this year that were one time only – one for infrastructure and one for equipment.
    - Hutterites wanted to apply but it was past
* Ryan pointed out the way Food and Ag funding has gone up and down, which makes it hard to plan for the future.
  + Kerri said she will certainly make a point of this if it’s important. Reach out to representatives when this is up for legislation.
  + Joel said the up and down was created by increasing the FADCs.
  + Ryan: I would encourage Joel to talk with local legislation.
  + Kerri is happy to help, but it helps a lot if we pay attention to what is happening and let her know.
* Executive Committee meetings every other month to keep up on any things that need to happen.
* We will eventually have a brief one-pager of all our programs.

**REGIONAL ROUNDUP**

**Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County**

* We received the Pilot Community Tourism grant for $1.25 million.
* Big Timber is trying to get another water tower to sustain new housing developments.
* 30% of our houses are vacant (not empty – just owners not living there most of the year).

**Tina Toyne, City of Hardin Economic Development**

* Before leaving the County, we selected Ayers for the Big Horn County housing study consultant. Tina will remain the point of contact for that since no one is in place yet.
* County has 2 applicants they will be interviewing for EDD.
* Conducted public engagement portion for the Wayfinding Planning grant.
* Will be meeting with LeBeau-Simone to do affordable housing at Western Motel.
* One Health – meeting to discuss master plan for that acreage
* Tanks taken out of Flying J.
* DQ still not open
* Dan’s Custom Design is closing
* Lumber Zachs is for sale, Four Aces for sale
* Dollar General going in – this is the 4th one
* Speedy and Flo’s Sweetcorn – Flo’s daughter’s greenhouse is up and running
* Maverick station is going in
* Monette Farms is a company from Canada farming in Big Horn County and they have purchased a lot of land. They purchased a fertilizer company near the railroad and want to distribute their product via railway. They are talking to other farmers in hopes of helping them all.

Holly Higgins was not able to attend, but she sent these notes with Tina to present:

* There is new Barber Shop and Coffee shop in Lodge Grass called Arise. First new businesses in the last 35-40 years. Bud the Barber. They’re in a makeshift trailer set up on a city lot across from City Hall.
* The combiners are rolling in, so grain harvest should be running hard soon.
* Cattle prices still strong. One client sold 560lb steer calves at $3.18/lb. @ $1800.

**Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District**

* Water was an issue at one time and the State took over adjudication of water rights. It sounds like there may be more water available to reservation lands coming. Important to have good stewardship for water allocation.
* Invasive species check stations still very important. Inspected 3700 boat trailers to date in 2024.
* 310 permits – State law MT-310 – accountability to people who want to work in active flowing streambeds to ensure the work they do won’t cause turbidity or cause erosion downstream.

Tory asked why state/county taxes went up.

* Scott said it was the State. Counties got blamed.

Kerri said if anyone wants to talk to her about the state sales tax, she would be happy to discuss that.

Danny said that having multiple sources of revenue increases stability for a business or organization.

**Randy Weimer, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine**

* It’s been a rough year – declining commodity prices over the past couple years have really hurt
* Palladium dropped from 3K/ounce to $950/ounce over last few years.
* 700 total employees amongst the 5 counties
* In December they let go of 100 employees plus 300 direct and vetted contractors.
* Keep trying to keep costs down, but it’s really a band-aid
* Losing tens of millions every month.
* Looking at near future for Sibanye-Stillwater.
  + Likely will go into Care and Maintenance – keep things maintained and be ready to go back to production when prices improve.
* Ryan asked if there was a factor in the price drops
  + A lot of palladium is coming from Russia. We can’t buy from Russia right now, so they are going through China to sell it to us.
  + EV vehicles push is hurting since 90% of palladium goes toward catalytic converters
* Ryan wondered if TAA (Trade Adjustment Assistance) needs to be in place if something significant happens.
* Randy said they are looking at many options and hope they don’t need to go into complete Care and Maintenance. Looking at 2025.

**Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County**

* Tourism is alive and well.
* BSPRA received $650K for the test. 2 routes approved (only 2 approved in the whole country). Southern will go through Billings to MN. El Paso to Billings route will go through Carbon. Inspection for track is happening. Could have RR going through as soon as in 2025.
* Fromberg’s water project is happening now – updating 80-year-old water system.
  + $150,000 from County to secure pumps down by the river.
* Home of Champions Rodeo was a success. Sold out of every seat on July 4th – first time in history. So busy you couldn’t use your cell phone.
* American Legion Hall in Fromberg is going to be rebuilt – need to put a roof on, rebuild, need some grants and will talk to Beartooth.
* Carbon County Fair is next week – go support the kids
* Barley started this week. Cows are up, barley is being harvested.
* No fires in Carbon County so far.

**Brent Moore, City of Red Lodge (Interstate Engineering)**

* Red Lodge has a resort tax, & revenues have recently grown from 600K to 1.5 million.
  + Supports water, sewer streets, fire, EMS, helped us build a community pool
  + Allows us to leverage those funds for additional funding through the State
* Beartooth Rally is this week.
* Busy helping communities through 2026 with the flooding projects – so Interstate and most engineers around here are very busy.
* Grant – Mt Maurice fire in 2021 burned around old spring boxes. Post-fire rain events have created erosion. $1 million to help correct that.
* FEMA and State funding project
* Lot of housing development projects being proposed, constructed.
  + Alpine Basin
  + Spires – another 87 acres behind the Phase 1 that may be developed
* New mayor and new public works director started this year and both are doing great.

**Ryan VanBallegooyen, Billings Job Service**

* ARPA money was very helpful because has less hoops to jump through. Helped a lot of people and most have stuck with their jobs (4 out of 5).
* 64 jobs every quarter being added in Montana is the prediction that Ryan has seen. Low unemployment is here to stay for a while.

**Danny Choriki, Ubet Post**

* Mainly focusing on family violence cycle. Working with Billings Area Family Violence Task Force. We connect through relationships – must have someone in your Contact List when you need help. During Covid a lot of those contacts left.
  + Danny gave us a little handout and said they are working to create an online database.
* Family Justice Center in Billings. Will be hiring a Navigator – someone who understands the process and can help clients.
* Sept. 8th – Bill McKibben will be kicking off Climate Week at MSU-B.

**Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County Planning & Economic Development**

* Some housing development going on.
* Enjoying the Civic Center – County Fair is this week.
  + The new civic center markets itself and the Beartooth board meeting will be there in November
  + MMA fight will be held there
* Partnering with Beartooth RC&D on RCAC grant program for Columbus,
* Bike Rally – 400-500 bike riders from across U.S. came through.
* Low unemployment – it’s really hard to recruit people. Admin position starting at $20/hour – no one will apply.
* Steph is the public information officer for the County and wants to do better in coordinating communications.

**Bob VanOosten, Stillwater Conservation District**

* Good reserve of water in Stillwater. Lot of land that could use irrigation, but the cost of getting it to the right places is prohibitive.
* Used ARPA money. Both Stillwater and Rosebud did a lot of damage with the flooding. The Federal government gave NRCS some emergency money to repair and protect.
* Administer grants for both Stillwater and Carbon counties.
* Floodplain person (Stephanie Ray) has been very good and helped us through a lot.
* He mentioned a project that is on engineering revision 8 and may never get completed. Frustrating to watch a perfectly good, engineered plan not get completed.

**Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County**

* New Coke plant opened up in Billings. $100 million investment.
  + Water is supplied from the City/Yellowstone River.
* Spent $25 million of ARPA at Metra – nice camping, electrical, sewer, water.
* Highway 3 bypass is open. Beautiful drive.
* New exit going into Lockwood – that project is moving, but it will take quite a while. Probably 2 years out.

**Martin DeWitt, SBA**

* Lenders can now add a guarantee onto an existing loan – there are some rules, of course!
  + Benefit for borrowers and lenders
* Investing in America funds
  + 1.7 billion in private sector commitments in Montana
  + 1 billion in funding to provide affordable, high-speed internet
  + 258,000 seniors will save money on prescription drug costs
  + $2 billion to provide clean water across MT

**Jeff McDowell, Two Rivers Authority**

* Resurfacing project in Toluca.
* Tribal water projects in Greenough Creek and in another place.

**Meeting adjourned at 3:05 pm.**

**Next Beartooth RC&D Board of Directors Meeting: Sept. 19th, 2024 at the Roberts Fire Hall, Roberts, MT**

**Optional tour of Joliet Business and Pocket Park.**