**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**May 16, 2024 – 1:00 pm**

**Sweet Grass County Annex Conference Room**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Tina Toyne, Big Horn County/City of Hardin Economic Development Director

Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County Economic Development

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Page Dringman, Sweet Grass City-County Planning Director/Floodplain Administrator

Martin DeWitt, Small Business Administration

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Tory Kolkhorst, Senator Daines’ Office

Kayla Vokral, SBDC

Lorene Hintz, Big Sky Economic Development / SBDC

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

**Present on Zoom:** Thank you, Sibanye-Stillwater Mine, for the grant to help us purchase our Meeting Owls!

Emily Schneller, Congressman Rosendale’s Office

Josiah Porcel, Senator Tester’s Office

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

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

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

**Congressional Updates:**

**Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**

* Sen. Tester sponsored the Laken Riley Act– to detain illegal immigrants and improve border security. Only democrat to co-sponsor this legislation.
* Sen. Tester reintroduced constitutional amendment to mandate a balanced budget. Prohibits federal government from spending more than it receives.
* Addressing concerns about mercury and air toxic standards rule potentially leading to premature closure of Colstrip power plant. Sent letter to EPA administrator Michael Regan. Expressed concerns in Senate Appropriations Committee meeting.

**Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale)**

* Expecting to see Farm Bill text to come out Saturday.
* Some movement in the Congressman’s VA Web Act – passed committee recently to improve monitoring system for VA website.
* Recent rules/mandates finalized that are of concern – forcing manufacturers to start electric vehicles starting with model years 2027; and coal and natural gas plant regulations (Colstrip). Pushing back on those regulations.
* Giving birth any day. Connected Myrna to District Director Jenna McKinney and Field Rep Wesley, who will fill in for her.

**Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines)**

* Sen. Daines, Gov. Gianforte, Sen. Zinke and Congressman Rosendale – calling attention to Biden Admin for trying to shut down future coal production.
* Pres. Biden is letting American Left dictate policy in Gaza. Want to stand with Israel. Concerned about college protests happening and anti-Semitism. Sen. Daines visited George Washington campus to see what is happening in person.
* Overturn Biden rule that will shut down coal and natural gas producers. Introduced a CRA (Congressional Review Act) resolution to overturn.
* Calling on the Washington Commanders to honor the Wetzel family and heritage. Trying to make sure the family does right by that family (Washington Redskins logo).
  + Ryan mentioned that Donny Wetzel is the Native American liaison for Dept. of Labor.
* Grizzly Bear delisting: Sen. Daines questioned Sec. Holland and asked for numbers of grizzlies. She couldn’t tell him. He shared those numbers – grizzlies have far surpassed the target numbers.

**Treasurer/Financial Reports: Nan Knight**

* See p. 17 of board materials for details.
* Myrna and Nan have been working the past month to get all data entered for Down Home Solutions, our new loan software. It’s going well and we’re getting closer to going live. Customer service has been awesome.
* 23 active loans – 1.7 million loaned out. Closed one new loan in March. Committee has approved another new loan in Big Timber, waiting for closing.
* Found out we didn’t get the IRP funding. Only $400,000 was given out nationwide, and our single application was for $750,000. We will discuss whether to apply again or go after some EDA funds.
* New funding- resubmit IRP application & applied for Big Sky Economic Development Revolving Loan Fund Grant Program ($500,000). Should hear in June.
* Sitting right where we should be on both RLF and Beartooth books. $639,000 available in all pots together.
* Nan later mentioned her newest loan client, Grindy’s Cheeseballs, and some of their issues with lab testing.

**RLF Financial and RC&D Financials (ACTION). Tina Toyne motioned to approve them as presented. Melanie Roe seconded. Motion passed.**

**New Hire (Joel):** Hired a new staff member recently with RCAC grant funds. Part-time Community Coordinator. Gina Schaible is a Joliet community leader who has been very involved in Joliet activities and will be a great addition.

**RCAC (Jacy/Nan):** Building Rural Economies grant. Will be building a committee to recruit people for the 8 parts of wealth (intellectual, etc). Shifts mindset to build the community based on existing assets. Will create value chains – partnerships of how people can work together on mutually beneficial projects. There is a YouTube video: Building Rural Economies Lewistown, MT. Look it up to get an idea of what the program will do. Will do 4 workshops and a 3-year project. Beartooth will be able to take knowledge and training and share with other communities, too.

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Operations Support – Myrna Lastusky**

Red Lodge USDA RCDI (Rural Community Development Initiative)

* Began the Bridger Housing Study last month and held our first of 3 community meetings. Some pushback from a few citizens who are concerned about any kind of growth, so we are working to educate on Mutual Self-Help program. Even negative feedback is helpful – we know what they do NOT want!
* Continued work on a potential property in Roberts as well as a development in Red Lodge.
* Hosted a couple of MSH trainings for community members in April.
* At MEDA Conference, touring the Spires MSH housing development was one of the tour options.
* Government officials from Buffalo and Sheridan, WY, came up to look at it and talk about their model and learn more.
* When the current homes are finished, there will be 14 new homes completed since 2021.

Big Horn / Hardin RCDI

* Tina Toyne can fill you in on most of the details over there.
* Met with commissioners and the City separately last week to discuss job description and moving forward with separate EDDs for each. USDA has approved this – just waiting for official paperwork.

Working with Nan to get data entered for new Down Home Solutions loan software, hiring of Community Coordinator have been a couple other things that have been busy.

**Economic Development / CRDC – Jacy Head**

**Brownfields**

* Have selected our 3 contractors – TetraTech, NewFields, and WWC.
* Doing programmatic documents – hoping to have that finalized by July 12th and then can begin assessing properties.
* Next Brownfield Steering Committee meeting in 2 weeks.
* Jacy has been working on the programmatic document that explains how we present the program and how we work on sites.
* Have garnered a lot of attention – Rocky Fork Inn still going through with FEMA buyout. DEQ has funds to demo and destroy that property.
  + Tory asked about FEMA buyout – they do a property assessment / market value analysis. FEMA will pay 75% of that and the buyer will pay 25% (or the owner will just accept the 75% of what FEMA will offer).
  + Lorene: Will they rebuild? No, as part of this, they are expected to demolish the existing structures. City hopes to make it a recreational area, possibly build up for a flood barrier, create ADA-accessible fishing area.
  + Ryan: How do we get paid for that? Now we can charge time to Brownfields; previously it was out of goodness of our hearts.
* Eagle’s Nest property next door to Rocky Fork is also interested in doing a FEMA buyout.
* Lodge Grass lumberyard project is still moving forward.
* Hardin gas station – old Sinclair/Liberty, the Little Bighorn Camp, and the Sport Hut in Columbus are all in talks about Brownfields.
* DEQ Brownfields Collaboration- BRCD has been selected to be a sub recipient to one of DEQ’s capacity building grants (Environmental Justice grant); MOA will be dispersed by DEQ soon.
* DOC-Business Attraction – still working on Project Quartz, Black Diamond, and Sentinel.
  + Just yesterday was a call with a housing company from the Netherlands
* Zartico= State has a subscription to access this database that provides info for free to the Montana counties. If anyone would like info on this, reach out to Jacy.

**Food and Ag Program – Joel Bertolino**

**Beartooth FADC**

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* Had a 2-day training with FADCs in Livingston in April. Toured Livingston Food Bank / Enterprise Center and a dairy. Talked a lot about GTA process.
* RFSI (Rural Food Systems Initiatives) – has created some new funding opportunities for middle-supply chain ag / Value-added ag.
  + This round is for equipment.
* Rodi Farm: Applying for a GTA Marketing Grant (up to $20,000). Also considering the RFSI grant app.
* Samurai Sue’s is building a new processing facility in Red Lodge.
* Released new funding from ARPA funds for ag infrastructure – had 3 or 4 businesses that applied for those, still awaiting word
* Had a successful MEDA Spring Conference in Red Lodge in April – whole staff helped and it went really well.

**Growth Through Ag and USDA Projects**

* Yellowstone Pasta: Received $50K with GTA
  + Small area off of Central. Hoping to expand. Fresh pasta from Montana flour. He was a chef for 20 years and had trouble accessing pasta. New equipment will allow him to make 6 times as much. He already has more orders than he can fill. Fresh pasta can be found at Town & Country.
* Speedy & Flo’s Sweet Corn: Assisting him with $50K award. Finishing up structure by late summer – will have a retail location and a greenhouse when done.
* Yellowstone Valley Farm: Interested in RFSI, ARPA, and REAP applications.
* Rodi Farm: Applied for USDA VAPG grant, also.
* Stovall Ranch and Yellowstone Feeders: Applied for ARPA AG Infrastructure grant.

**Ongoing Projects**

* Oswald Farms – interested in ARPA funds but didn’t submit app.
* Becky’s Berries – ongoing assistance on new mustard line.

**FADC Outreach**

* J&D Meats – Hardin. Joel visited them in Hardin last month.
* Speedy & Flo’s Sweetcorn – Hardin
* Visited Yellowstone Valley Food Hub yesterday with MMEC. They just received $250K grant through initial RFSI grant to expand operation and add some food processing.

**Initial Contact**

* The Grange – Big Timber. Working with them on their concept. Group headed by Sarah Andrews on regenerative value-added ag products including meat processing. Put her in touch with SBDC.
* Alaskan Seafood Guys – Joel said if they find a way to use some local foods in their offerings, then they could apply for some funding.
* Ron Kliensasser – Mountain View Colony. Will be visiting again in the next month.
* Justin Dye – Farm Box – pop-up retail for local food products.
* Nan mentioned Grindy’s Cheeseballs, one of her new loan clients, and how delicious their cheeseballs are.
* Myrna mentioned the REAP program – if you know anyone who is doing energy upgrades (lighting, coolers, irrigation pumps, etc). Nan and Martin said car washes, stockwells, etc. can all utilize this grant.
  + Martin mentioned being able to utilize the RBDG to pair with that. He said a rural grocery store ended up saving $10,000 per month after upgrades!
  + 50/50 right now; reimbursement grant. Once you submit application, you can purchase the equipment.
  + Martin said even newer businesses may be able to apply for it

**Regional Roundup:**

**Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County:**

* Continuing Capital Improvement Project work and putting in elevator and restrooms in courthouse to be ADA-compliant. $4 million project.
* 88-turbine wind farm going up & solar farm possibly coming
* Stillwater County Youth Fair – instead of a business/craft fair, it was for youth ages 5-17
  + 46 booths, thousands of dollars exchanged
  + $10 registration fee for a booth; They got their $10 back in Civic Bucks to purchase things at the event
  + The youth could sell their wares or services
  + Gave out awards for Business Potential, People’s Choice, Best Presentation
* Town Pump is doing a facelift – will be a huge economic driver. One of busiest in state.
* New ownership in the 307 – stop and try them out.
* Last projects from Stillwater 2022 flooding going on.
* Annual Board training in June.
* Status of mine being monitored.
* Did EOC team training and are now ICS-certified.
* 2-day full-immersion training with Northwestern Energy on Mystic Lake (Row Dam at Mystic Lake) and how to respond if it would break.
* Big Sky EDA did a great training at Stillwater County Pavilion. Others can rent it! It’s a great wedding, family reunion, etc venue.

**Paige Dringman, Columbus City Planner**

* City is applying again for a water tower – critical to Big Timber growing.
* Have a 120-lot subdivision going in.
* Van Haven – for people who live in conversion vans – kind of gated community.
* Working to put together Crazy Mountain Collective group – City, County, nonprofits, businesses who are working together on economic development.
  + Put together the Pilot Tourism Grant. Will move ahead with or without grant.
* Sarah Andrews contacted them for The Grange looking for a place – not many options IN Big Timber, but they are meeting with her soon.
* Couple meetings with the Mine.
* Tour with new business across from Shiloh Rifle Co. Part of the Ultimate Defense Project with Business Attraction (gun safety manufacturer).
  + Nan: They are looking for a temporary place in Billings. They need to be close to Billings but want to be rural, so are mainly looking at Big Horn or Big Timber.
  + Projected workforce need is 150 with good salaries.
* Wind Farm project.
* Lot of interest with airport, conversations about hangars for bigger aircraft.

**Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County**

* Metra – have $30 million invested, most underground. Many more camping spaces. Used ARPA money to get water in, upgrade electric, toilets, etc. Should be done (hopefully) before the Fair.
* Jails: Just did a needs assessment. Expensive look at what we need to lock up all the people the other counties don’t have room for.
* Building a short-term jail as well to get people off the road temporarily. 35-70 cells. Under design right now.

**Tina Toyne, Big Horn County / City of Hardin**

* Got Wayfinding planning going. Working with Brent from Interstate. Scheduling public outreach during Little Bighorn Days.
* City applied for Pilot Tourism Grant – hope to hear about June 14th
* May 28th workforce housing meeting that the committee will be involved in.
* RFP for County Housing Study is out – have published and also sent to different engineers since the classifieds in Big Horn County times are only in the hard copy, not online.
* Carnival set up on golf course. Carnival owners purchased it a couple years back, then sold it . . . back and set up there
* Crow Tribe and Montana Healthcare Foundation presented to City/County Planning Board about Western Motel – wanting to turn it into a treatment place / sober living facility.
* Traffic study completed with Maverick property, so things will move forward.
* Outlaw Café and Theater is open – new signage, new paint.
* Dollar General (the 3rd one!) will be coming in. Hoping to have more produce, fresh fruit.
* Dairy Queen waiting to get repaired and then hope to sell to another DQ owner.
* Working with Business Attraction – working with mayor, City Finance, code inspector on to better market in Hardin.
* 2 new businesses in Lodge Grass – a coffee shop and a barber shop. Faith Chapel helped with it. Mayor Dabney said these are the first new businesses in 40 or 50 years.
* One Health is partnering with Encompass Design on their acreage, and asked if the City would help with a Mini Market Study.
* Tina is planning to apply with the City to apply for their Economic Development Director position. Everyone was very happy to hear this!

**Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Job Service**

* Hosted annual Jobs Jamboreee – 1000+ people, over 100 businesses. People are more prepared, but also are a little more edgy these days with businesses – maybe the inflation. Employers were happy that serious prospects showed up.
* Workforce – new computer system for internal use. Will be rolled out this summer.
* If an employer is stuck on something, have someone else look at the job description. Sometimes there are easy fixes to make it better – trainable position, etc.
* Invested a lot of ARPA money – have helped 1,000 people with that funding and it didn’t have a lot of strings, like a lot of federal programs do.
  + Myrna asked Emily, Tory, and Josiah to take that back to the senators and congressmen.
  + Ryan said they did provide feedback to WIOA (Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act).
  + Tory said it’s always helpful to hear from Montanans on how things will or won’t work for them. She also mentioned AI as being a helpful tool to everyone.

**Martin DeWitt, SBA**

* Just had National Small Business Week. People nominated people in the area and had great winners.
  + Did a round table session with some innovation and ag people. Fantastic session. Best discussion they’d had all week.
  + Business that catered it was someone who’d received SBA assistance, the venue had received SBA assistance – it was great to highlight so many different businesses.
* Government Contracting Program – processing applications again after lawsuit last year against USDA.
* Capital Access – 7A program just went through some changes. Some benefits for lenders as far as protecting their guarantee. Adds a couple days to process, but it helps secure the guarantee (this used to be a bigger risk). Some fee waivers are happening (some temporary). Veterans who own businesses can get fee reductions.
* Overall loan numbers are up this year, but in Montana we are lower on the growth side. Has to do with SSBCI, which is similar to our 7A program. High interest rates, too.
* For land deals over $150,000, keep our 504 Loan Program in mind – below market rates on 40% of it, bank sets rate on 50%. Good deal for borrowers.

**Kayla Vokral, SBDC**

* Helping with The Hive – HS pitch competition through Billings SD2. Some who they had coached took home prizes.
  + The winner was a 16-year-old named Noah who sells dog treats.
  + A 16/17-year-old Crow biz owner studied the beading, tans leather, paints on it, and sells pieces of that for thousands. 2nd year of coaching her on pitches & she placed both years.
  + Mexican Treat business that has done well on all Farmers Markets. She placed, too.
* Worked with DBA downtown on Battle of the Plans – can win $40,000 each. Working on business plans for them to pitch in August.
  + Linda with Something Chic won in 2018 and got started that way.
* BillingsWorks – summer intern program launched. Over 36 interns that will be placed with small businesses in Yellowstone County.
* Financial Mini-series with Beartooth
  + Next one is June 18th in Red Lodge on Balance Sheet / Profit and Loss
* Lender Outreach to all 9 counties in July.
* Air service – Allegiant is adding additional flights, plus Sun Country Airlines will offer direct to Minneapolis starting in June.
* Zero to Five and BillingsWorks – discussion on childcare. Can touch base offline for more details.
* Nominated 3 SBA award winners – Yarn Bar, Graphic Finesse, and Karen Grosz
* Montana Growth Funds – applied for to offer a source of funds.
* SSBCI – put in 8 applications, and 7 were approved.

**Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County:**

* Crazy Mountain Cattle Stockgrowers: Are doing a tour to look at a couple ranches, have lunch at Melville, and bring people back to town.

**Next Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting: July 18th – Beartooth RC&D, Joliet 12:30 pm Board Luncheon with informal meeting to follow.**