**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**May 19, 2022 – 1:00 pm**

**Columbus Fire Hall**

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Bob Van Oosten, Stillwater County Conservation District

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

Commissioner Sidney Fitzpatrick, Big Horn County

Tina Toyne, Big Horn County

Danny Choriki, Billings City Council

Commissioner Steve Riveland, Stillwater County

Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County

Lorene Hintz, SBDC

Kayla Vokral, SBDC

Brent Moore, City of Red Lodge

Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District

**Meeting Called to Order:** Board Chairman Ryan Van Ballegooyen

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

**Review March Board Minutes (Action): Holly Higgins motioned to approve the minutes. Melanie Roe seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:** None present

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

1. **Treasurer Update – pp 9-11**
   * RLF Update – got another proposal for Yellowstone. Hopefully will close next month for a car wash in Laurel.
   * 16 current loans
   * In 1st position on a new loan in Carbon County
   * Still waiting on de-federalization
   * Received payoff for Stillwater County loan (TOC) at beginning of May
   * RLF funds are getting a little low with all the activity we’ve had - $262, 916 available – not including funding for the car wash
     + Sidney asked who the Big Horn County loans were
       - Chiropractor and Dill Properties that is closed now
2. **RC&D Financials (Action)**
   * See page 12 Beartooth Books
   * See below for Action on RC&D Financials.
3. **RLF Financials (Action)**

* Ryan said for the first time in his 10 years we are starting to ask if we need to request more RLF money. So far the Executive Committee has decided there are other things we can focus our attention on right now, but it’s exciting to think about.
  + Nan said she is going to be helping Jacy with a big project that is exciting and will involve all the counties. More info down the road.
  + Sidney got contacted from Commerce. Bed tax in MT is almost $4 Billion (for one year!). There is a lot of money available for tourism activities. $1 million earmarked to tribes. Keep in mind for upcoming projects.
  + Holly asked if we know the percentage the loans are up.
    - Nan is getting ready to close her 3rd loan since coming on board in November. Another one in the works that is in Yellowstone County – more community development and would be from EDA de-federalized money.
      * Joel: in the previous 24 months, wehad only 1 approved, so there has been a lot more activity.
* **Melanie Roe motioned to approve the Beartooth RC&D/RLF financials. Scott Miller seconded. Motion carried.**

**CEDS UPDATE (Jacy Head)**

* We’re doing pretty well and shouldn’t need too much more input from you all. Myrna and I have the data we need and just need to compile it and build the actual document.
* Must put out for public comment by the end of July and will keep you updated.
* Ryan asked about the survey Myrna put out on goal prioritization
  + Myrna: We got **great** response, so thank you, everyone!
* Brief discussion on the excellent CEDS Committee meetings & input
* BSTF Signature (Action) – Jacy will be signatory and Nan will also
  + Any objections? None
  + **All in favor to let Jacy and Nan sign for necessary paperwork – motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project updates**

**Food/Ag Program – Joel Bertolino**

* Long report, but it’s been busy. Had a call from Weston Merrill, Dept of Ag, who wanted input from Joel and was putting together a tour for the Governor’s office to tour businesses who have received funding. Joel and Weston developed a tour plan and got to many businesses.
  + Started at Becky’s Berries, then went to Midland Bull Test, then Blue Creek Marbled Meat, Ranch House Meat, Grains of Montana, and Yellowstone Valley Food Hub. They next day they went to a ranch outside of Billings (High 5 Meats) and Swanky Roots.
  + Photos at end of report from that tour.
* GTA / Value-Added Ag Grants
  + New England Chowder Co – Craig Rief, Big Timber
    - Been in business 18 years on the east coast. Have a line of soups they market across the US and internationally.
    - Visited about equipment needs and grant sources and where they can source local ingredients.
    - Potatoes and herbs in local greenhouses.
    - Use of bones from meat processors to make broth.
    - He owns the building they are in.
    - Melanie said Colter Todd at the brewery has been involved, but she doesn’t know too much about it.
    - Joel said the equipment they have is fantastic.
  + BioEconomy Solutions – Victor Garlington, Hardin
    - Worked on and off last several months
    - Representing investors to develop camelina plant outside of Hardin
    - Looking at potential funding packages, loans
    - Most interested in designing a rail spur for their project. Joel put them in touch with an engineering firm that has a lot of expertise in this. They have been happy with this firm.
    - Joel will get a tour of that fairly soon.
    - Sidney asked if it was on Black Creek – Joel said he was looking at 2 different sites and wasn’t sure what he settled on (maybe Dunmore?)
      * Sidney discussed a group that took over some farmland and wonders if it’s the same group. Possibly.
  + Oswald Farms – Melissa Oswald, Joliet
    - Have a feedlot and started developing relationships with local consumers and a bar and steakhouse. Raise beef and direct sell to steakhouses and other local consumers.
    - Want to expand and build a retail facility on Hwy 310. Joel helped them put together a grant app.
    - Want to include other local products there too.
  + Meadlowlark Brewing – Travis Peterson, Billings
    - Joel toured their new facility on the west end of Billings.
    - Should be a great business and great help to barley and hop growers of MT.
  + Ranch House Meats / Pure MT Meats – Tonya Flowers, Huntley
    - Helped develop their ARPA app.
    - Received $200K for their operations.
    - Processing plant and also a retail place.
* Ongoing Projects
  + Mill Creek Farms – Josh Sian, Pompey’ s Pillar
    - Heifer development facility. Unfunded ARPA app.
  + Blue Creek Marbled Meat – Nels Pearson, Billings
    - Took tour – see picture
    - Received $300K for new project
    - Have 1.3 million into it
    - Hope to be ready in July
    - Joel referred them to Dept of Ag for the tour; lots of press for that tour
    - Fantastic facility – maybe best in MT
  + Yellowstone Valley Farms – Reuben Stahl, Laurel
    - Trying to expand his sweet basil business
    - Sells directly to Sysco and FSA
    - Put in ARPA proposal; not funded
  + Carbon County Meats – Sabina Giovetti, Belfry
    - Working on and off with them
    - Small meat plant
    - Unsuccessful grant apps but are looking to expand their facility and Joel arranged tours and meetings with other meat processors.
    - Brian Engle of Pioneer Meats also connected them with many other meat processors at an event he put together.
    - Scott asked if they were moving to Bridger – not sure on that yet.
  + Prime Meats of MT – Lamont Herman, St. Xavier
    - Unapproved funding but still looking
    - Trying to retail in BHC and YC
    - Holly said he is trying to get in Al Sargent’s building on Main Street.
  + Primitive Meats – Kelsey Grice, Worden
    - Startup. Put in touch with engineer for new meat plant
    - Joel helped with grant app and they received $150K
    - Will be meeting with them again for next plans
  + Basin, Inc – Judy Edwards, Big Timber
    - Direct market beef business
    - Received Value-added grant last year
    - Pulled out of grant apps this year
  + Yellowstone Valley Food Hub – Michelle Schahczenski, Billings
    - Trying to finish up last GTA grant they received
    - Growing and have some space needs
  + 406 Bovine – Bryan Elliot, Laurel
    - Joel will be meeting with him soon
    - Facial recognition app for beef cattle
    - He’s been in feedlots in TX, OK, and KS promoting his product and collecting data.
  + Stillwater Packing/Emmett’s Meats – Jason Emmett, Columbus
    - They hosted us and talked with Giovettis of Carbon County Meats – very helpful
    - Discussed their incinerator and some issues they’ve had with that. High cost of getting rid of hides
  + Pioneer Meats – Brian Engle, Big Timber
    - $50K GTA grant money
    - $150K of ARPA
  + Becky’s Berries – Becky Stahl, Absarokee
    - Hosted Dept of Ag
    - Great story behind her business
    - Has some expansion plans for a line of freeze-dried berries and will need to purchase some new equipment for that.
* List of businesses Joel has had contact with recently and more pics from Dept of Ag tour.
* Ryan: Joel just mentioned $870K that went to our counties. Some others he didn’t mention amounts, but money is going to them, too.
  + Joel: The ARPA funds were a one-time opportunity and glad some of them took advantage of it.

**Economic Development/ CRDC – Jacy Head**

* Finishing out EDA CARES money
  + Deb Brown – providing Watch Parties, Bozeman Trail project. Myrna doing many efforts with that.
  + Big Sky EDA funded Economic Response and Recovery Team – provided collaboration and trainings for region
  + Cushing Terrell Regional Housing Study – have final report from them
* Big Sky Trust Fund – 2 projects
  + Red Lodge Pea Cannery – finished in April. Paynes (owners) are going to create an art gallery, book store, and a coffee shop.
  + Stillwater Industrial/Business Park Feasibility Study – hired KLJ and had first kickoff meeting with Comm. Riveland and Steph Ray. Going well.
* ARPA – still educating self on the opportunities and attending trainings
* USDA RCDI Grant in Big Horn County – great news: Tina Toyne was recently hired for the EDD position there and Jacy will be working with her.
  + Quarterly report was submitted.
* CEDS – gave an update earlier. Have to be done by end of Julyfor public comment, then 30 days to respond to comments before submitting in September.
* Reporting for grants – all quarterly, semi-annual, and annual reports were completed
* Red Lodge Workforce Housing Committee – using a recording of our Regional Housing Study for one of their events.
* Helping Hands Food Bank in Hardin – DEQ Petroleum Brownfields eligibility has been completed and Targeted Brownfields Grant is submitted.
* MEDA Spring Conference is next week. Jacy is attending. Dept of Commerce has asked all CRDC to come early to discuss changes in their programs
* RCDI grant was submitted for RLACF – Robin Adams is leaving and they are looking for a Workforce Housing Manager to replace Robin. If this grant application is approved, the new housing manager would break out from the community foundation (RLACF) and create a separate nonprofit. The process will include training to become a loan processor and workforce housing training.
  + Danny Choriki said Billings has a moderate group looking into workforce housing and also downtown housing. They and BSEDA have made workforce housing a priority for the foreseeable future.
    - Jacy said Workforce Housing will be a big part of the CEDS.
  + Danny said they have put in 2 mills for prevention of problems around public safety and discussing what to do with cannabis excise tax. Will probably go towards prevention – breaking poverty cycle, public safety issues, and so on.
* Joel asked about the regional housing study cited recently
  + Jacy: KULR8 had an article/news segment on the $114,000 affordability gap in Carbon County and cited our housing study.

**Operations Support- Myrna Lastusky**

* Working with Jacy on CEDS
* Bozeman Trail project: meetings, communications, mapping progress, National Historic Trail designation/feasibility study efforts & letters of support.
  + Looking into doing some presentations in various communities with trail rides from one stop to the next (possibly horse/wagon, possibly bike or . . .?). Let Myrna know if your community might be interested to be part of this event. Summer 2023.
* Joliet Committees: working with a couple groups to revitalize Main Street. Jammin’ Out in Joliet is on June 25th 10 am – 11 pm. DJ music, band, vendors, games for kids, etc.

**Regional Roundup**

* Infrastructure
  + Housing
  + Transportation
  + Broadband
* Economy
  + Upturns or downturns in industry sectors
  + New business openings (or closures)
* Communication
  + Marketing and outreach
* Services
  + Health care
* Natural Resources
  + Agriculture
  + Energy
* Human Capital
  + Workforce
  + Education

**Heidi Sparks, City of Laurel**

* Lost our treasurer last month. A clerk stepped up and is filling the role. Many process changes.
* Building code gal gave notice, Planner resigned earlier this year . . . so lots going on from staffing perspective.
* Projects:
  + Bid for S. 4th reconstruction from 1st (hwy) to South Pond. Pretty big deal. 1 of first steps to rebuilding south side infrastructure
  + West Railroad Road project on State Dept of Transportation schedule. Approved by DOT and they are starting the design phase. Great to see progress in older infrastructure needs.
* Annexations: Golf course getting new clubhouse and working to annex around that.
  + Joel said there’s a lot of commercial growth in Laurel right now.
* Heidi said City Brew is coming in where old Burger King was. Also, a Chinese restaurant.
* IGA is leaving and becoming Albertsons.
* Former Taco Johns building is becoming Your Pie Pizza.
* Anytime Fitness is coming in the former Helena building that has a sign up now

Scott Miller, Carbon County

* Chris Stovall, clerk and recorder, is retiring in July. 2 people running for that office in July. There will be a small gap between retirement and new hire.
* Not many houses to buy unless you have some millions to spend.
* Hwy 212 – project the State is kicking off through the S-curve by the rest area. Lots of Amish with buggies, horses, and bikes and people drive way too fast here. Really hard to see them and worried about catastrophes.
  + Planning to widen the shoulders to help with issue
  + This will go through to Red Lodge
* Big Sky Rail Authority
  + We care most about it going south through Carbon County. Need billions of dollars to get it going. Will bring lots of jobs, but it takes money to do it.
  + Much further along than Scott thought it would be – maybe only 2 years from getting this going. Feds are pushing to get this moving.
  + Sidney: That was our transportation back in the day – RR went to Denver and other locations.
* Marijuana: Carbon County isn’t putting it back on the ballot. Bridger, Red Lodge, Roberts have dispensaries. Dealing with it as we can. Not enough people have done a petition to put back on the ballot – we’ll wait for the people to tell us what they want.
* Wind Farm is rolling well – we got $4.6 million from that and are pushing it out over 30 years to maintain roads.
* Health Dept is running great – 7 new employees, and they are in the school system and senior centers now. Working with the people. Before we had a contract with Beartooth Clinic – got rid of that and now the nurses, director, and everyone works FOR the people of Carbon County. People are loving this. Went to Seniors Aging Council yesterday and this Health Dept is getting us back in the direction we need to be.
* Northwestern – power lines
* Hiring 2 more road crew, one more Health Dept employee.
* Population is growing – new people moving in, new businesses, lots of growth. Nothing huge, but lots of growth.

**Brent Moore, Red Lodge**

* City pool project will be wrapped up in late June to open in July.
* Housing production with new developments, apartment complex.
* Last few years have been a lot of change.

**Steve Riveland, Stillwater**

* Housing shortage – not much for sale
* Exciting progress on new fairgrounds – Facilities Capital Improvement team decide to move forward on a building plan. Hope to break ground real soon.
* Planning for Law & Justice Center – hope to kick off in the next 18-24 months. $13.5 million project.
* Wind Farm breaking ground in July – plan to use impact funds for roads.
* Down to 2 commissioners in seat – one resigned a couple weeks ago.
* Quite a bit of turnover in our organization. New Emergency Service Specialist David Stamey is getting up and rolling.

**Danny Choriki, City of Billings**

* Marijuana – last year it was 8-3 to put it on the ballot; this year it would be 5-6 against. Such a crazy issue.
* Housing – couple things we’ve figured out:
  + In 2020 during the explosion of people moving in, 18% of purchasers were investors.
  + Trying to get a handle on how much short-term rentals are impacting us.
  + Trying to maintain the housing stock we have. Code enforcement is moving toward a more proactive model. Some new hires will be for code enforcement.
  + Group of people have come together to try to do downtown housing projects and tie the medical corridor in with that.
  + Have seen many companies come in (like Coca-Cola) using Billings as a regional transportation hub. Lot of money coming into town. A $30M project is coming in south of interstate. Coca-Cola will also be creating a bottling plant and will create a total of 120 jobs.
  + Joel asked if an Amazon warehouse was coming in – no, but there’s a new Costco being built at Zoo interchange.
  + Sidney asked about a box store in the Heights plus a new corridor into the Heights.
* Trying to do an intensive planning project for the Hwy 3 inner belt loop project and then also do it for the bypass on the north side of the Heights. A TIF in the Heights would make a lot of sense. In south Billings, they had a bunch of undeveloped land and were able to pull people into that TIF district, which will be funding $25M for a new recreation center.
  + Sidney said the county part of the Heights is really getting built up.

**Sidney Fitzpatrick, Big Horn County:**

* Introduced Tina Toyne, the brand new BHC Economic Development Director.
* Running for 3rd term. Opposition is County Sheriff that is in office.
* Since coal went away in BHC, we’ve had to get creative about changing our attitude because we had coal royalties to handle all the costs for so long. Coal royalties built everything and now it’s gone away. Only have one mine left – Spring Creek, which is now doing great and will stabilize our royalties. Holly is our banker and we are trying to develop some of the money and spread it out and invest it. No more free stuff – it will cost a fee for a cattle guard, etc. Everything coal money took away now needs to be rethought.
  + They had an appraisal of a trailer lot at $157K. Sidney wanted to be the realtor and put $165K on it. Just sold it for almost $200K. Now that money can go back into the capital improvement plan. Now they have Tina to help rethink some of these things and bring Hardin back from being a ghost town.
* City of Hardin police and other things have been challenging items.
* Our key word is sustainability – how do we sustain things for future generations?
* Lot of meth problems. Child murdered in BHC. Jail is packed full – 60-70 inmates in our 35-bed unit. Last week 5 young native men committed suicide.
* Sidney represents both Crow and Northern Cheyenne in Big Horn County.
* Represents Busby where they are going way too fast on the highway.
* Dan LaFonte is a butcher and wants to buy Clayton’s place by True Value and make it a butcher shop. Right now he’s catering weddings. Sidney will send him our way.
* Holly said S-Ranch Meats mainly process meat for their own label, but they have done some 4-H processing.
* Shipton’s moved in a year ago. It is really thriving. Farmers doubted when it moved in to Hardin, but they are real happy with it now. They get Wyoming folk coming up to save on sales tax and they stop in Hardin instead of going to Billings.
* Put marijuana on ballot. Have one dispensary coming next to the cemetery by Larry’s and another one is right on the reservation line and a 3rd one is trying to come.
  + Holly said the one’s revenue is $400K/month.
  + Scott said Carbon has ordinances to limit marijuana dispensing to solid buildings, not tents and shacks that can pop up overnight and disappear.

**Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin:**

* Not much to add from Sidney’s.
* Chinese restaurant closed – the Purple Cow. City of Hardin doesn’t want marijuana, but owner of Chevy supposedly bought the place and wants to open a dispensary. Holly thinks that fell through. Tina thinks the gas station next to it bought it to expand.

**Lorene Hintz/Kayla Vokral, SBDC**

* Building project is almost done – supposed to move in June. Plenty of hang-ups along the way, but they will let us know when grand opening happens.
* Fiber lines coming into Billings – people will have a choice between Spectrum and another fiber optics in the next 3 years.
* 2 weeks ago had a workforce summit – speaker from Gallup on how to keep employees and creating a culture other employees want to join.
* Economy is growing, but a big chunk of the workforce has retired.
* Launching a summer internship program – 16- to 19-year-olds put in applications, and businesses put in potential jobs. Program will launch in June. Youth will have a few days of training to learn about being in a professional environment and then start their jobs.
* Lane Gobbs did Lean Lego Training with them. Businesses learned how to put their line together.
  + Joel mentioned that we worked on a Food Venture Program grant that Kayla brought to our attention. It will provide more Montana-grown beef and food to schools.
  + 12-week course for food professionals is available. Could be for producers who want to package their own beef or someone who wants to open a food truck or . . . Once they pass they go into the program’s Facebook group and the value continues as they share info with each other.
    - Kayla has wanted to do this for a year and partnering with Joel got them the money they needed.

**Bob Van Oosten, Stillwater Conservation District**

* Pretty quiet lately on most fronts.
* Soil moisture is less than last year at this time. Need serious rain between now and Memorial Day.
* Mostly repairing previous flood damage – no big projects.
* Have had a lot of fiber optic and power lines going under streams. Bob lives 8 miles north of the interstate and has fiber optic to his house.

**Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation District**

* Working on an invasive species of grass called ventenata. It’s like a cancer. Not palatable, has sharp edges, eats up resources. They are educating people on identification and eradication.
* Check stations are up and running to keep mussels and other invasive species out of water.
* Dan understands how tough it must be for Sidney to represent two reservations – they don’t always get along.
* Prairie dogs are invading and creating problems for local landowners. Working on education and management.

**Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County**

* They are in the same housing boat as everyone else.
  + Half the houses are empty – only used a couple weeks per year.
* A couple new subdivisions are going in.
* Houses that were $200K a few years ago are now $600K and are selling in days.
* Transportation corridor – haven’t decided to join Big Sky Rail Authority yet.
* Broadband is going crazy – fiber is running everywhere. It’s also going up East Boulder road which will interfere with Mine traffic. It goes in and out of Park County and Sweet Grass County, so that’s an issue, too.
* New businesses:
  + Mexican restaurant was open for 2 weeks & is now closed due to no employees available.
  + Other restaurants have limited hours because there isn’t enough workforce.
  + Meat Producers Convention – Brian Engle brought people in, filled every hotel, restaurants cooked . . . it was a great event for the community.
* Workforce and affordable housing are the biggest challenges.
* Dan Lowe said that everyone in the room had mentioned problems in their communities, BUT everyone is very positive, and when we overcome problems, we are stronger. The difference between *ordinary* and *extraordinary* is **extra**, and he sees that with this group.

**Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service**

* 1200-1500 unemployed in Yellowstone County (people actively looking for work). There are 4200 job postings just that Ryan knows about.
* If you are competing for those employees, you’d better figure out what makes you special. Get creative with hours, benefits, whatever will get employees on board.
* Baby boomers worked really hard for a long time and finally get to retire. Loyalty to family was their number 1 value. For young folks today, their #1 value is also loyalty to family, but not in working more hours and putting food on the table; it’s “give me more time with my family.” Different solution, but it’s the **same value.** Keep that in mind.
  + Sidney: I’ve seen where they work 4-day weeks and have 3-day weekends.
  + Ryan: In New Zealand, you are in trouble if you work more than 40 hours / week in the medical field. The rest of world is ahead of us on the idea of working less hours. Give people a work-life balance, and we all need to find that. MT has high drinking, drug, suicide rates because many people work way too hard.
  + Steve said they hired a couple department heads who want to negotiate a lot to get good people in. They are competing with private industry that pays more than government usually, so you have to offer other benefits.
* Sidney: Want to toot Holly’s horn – she’s a new business owner in Hardin. She bought the carwash.

**Next Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting**: July 21st, 2022 - Beartooth RC&D

**Meeting adjourned at 3:15 pm.**