

2023 Annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) And Progress Report

Grantee: Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc.

Project Number: ED22DEN3020011

Period covered by the report: Jan. 1, 2023 – Dec. 31, 2023

Total Expenditures: Cumulative through end of reporting period

All line items may not apply. Please see latest authorized budget (SF-424) to fill out column 1.

Line Item	Total Budgeted (from SF424)	Federal Funds Expended	Match Funds Expended
Personnel	\$214,627	\$46,228	\$19,872
Fringe Benefits	\$25,691	\$5,374	\$2,304
Travel	\$14,185	\$3,150	\$1,350
Equipment*	\$0	\$0	\$0
Supplies	\$6,500	\$1,400	\$632
Contractual/Subaward*	\$0	\$0	\$0
Other	\$63,997	\$13,848	\$5,936
Indirect Costs	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total	\$325,000	\$70,000	\$30,094

*Contracts, Subawards, and Equipment expenditures require receipts/invoices to be attached.

Adjustments:

No significant adjustments were made to the strategy, program delivery, or service area during this reporting period.

Beartooth staff continue working to improve the website (www.beartooth.org) and our online presence, although there is still a long way to go. But it is slowly becoming a resource that others can look to for information and tools. We also post regular updates to our Facebook and LinkedIn

accounts. We continue efforts to be more proactive in marketing the organization and program areas. One of these strategies was putting our logo on various local promotions like shopping bags and cups for board members and staff.

We feel that our overall strategy is still sound and has stayed aligned with the needs of the region. With the help of a great CEDS Strategy Committee and a large amount of input from regional partners and business owners, we completed our 5-year CEDS document in September 2022. Key priorities include Workforce Development, Infrastructure Development, and Economic Growth and Resiliency. We worked hard to weave responsive initiatives, steady-state initiatives, and resiliency throughout the CEDS. For a thorough and current update on our CEDS goals and priorities, please see this recently submitted document at [e34482_e1f3688335214eae99d99ec1bc37625f.pdf](https://beartooth.org/e34482_e1f3688335214eae99d99ec1bc37625f.pdf) (beartooth.org).

Board/CEDS Committee List: EDD BOARD MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Updated 6/1/2023

EDA Board Guidelines: “The District Organization must demonstrate that its governing body is broadly representative of the principal economic interests of the Region, which may include the private sector, public officials, community leaders, representatives of workforce development boards, institutions of higher education, minority and labor groups, and private individuals.”

1. GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

Elected officials and/or employees of a general purpose unit of state, local or Indian tribal government who have been appointed to represent the government.

Name	Government	Position
Page Dringman	City of Big Timber	City Planner/Appointed by Big Timber City Council
Melanie Roe	Sweet Grass County	County Commissioner
Chris Mehus	Sweet Grass Conservation District	District Appointee
Danny Choriki	City of Billings	City Council member
Dan Lowe	Big Horn Conservation District	Board Member-elected county position
Don Jones	Yellowstone County	County Commissioner
Steve Riveland	Stillwater County	County Commissioner
Vacant	Crow (Apsaalooke) Nation	
Stephanie Ray	Stillwater County	Economic Dev. Coor.-employee of Stillwater County
Barb Wagner	Yellowstone Conservation District	Board Member-elected County position
Clinton Giesick	Carbon Conservation District	Board Member-elected County position
Scott Miller	Carbon County	County Commissioner
Brent Moore	City of Red Lodge	City Council member
Joe Purcell	City of Hardin	City of Hardin Mayor
Larry Vandersloot	Bighorn County	County Commissioner
Bob VanOosten	Stillwater Conservation District	Board Member - elected County position
Heidi Sparks	City of Laurel	City Council member

2. NON-GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

A. Private Sector Representatives: *Any senior management official or executive, holding a key decision-making position, with respect to any for-profit enterprise. (At least one required)*

Name	Company / Enterprise	Position
Liz Ching	Montana DOL	Apprenticeship Specialist
Randy Weimer	Sibanye-Stillwater Mine	Environmental & Public Affairs Manager
Holly Higgins	First Interstate Bank of Hardin	Branch Manager
Marissa Hauge	Montana Family Pharmacies	Executive Vice President

B. Stakeholder Organization Representatives: *Executive directors of chambers of commerce, or representatives of institutions of postsecondary education, workforce development groups or labor groups. (At least one required)*

Name	Organization	Position
Ryan Van Ballegooyen	Billings Job Service	Region 4 Director
Vacant, awaiting assignment	Sweet Grass County Chamber	Chamber of Commerce Director
Jeffrey McDowell	Two Rivers Authority	Executive Director
Kayla Vokral	Small Business Development Ctr	SBDC Training Manager & Business Advisor

3. AT LARGE REPRESENTATIVES: *Interested individuals qualified to provide input on behalf of their respective communities.*

Name	Company / Enterprise	Position
Patty Sundberg	City of Columbus	Appointed Representative for City of Columbus
Lorene Hintz	Big Sky EDA	Small Business Development Center
Bonnie Gray	Town of Joliet	Appointed by the Town of Joliet

CALCULATIONS

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
1. Government Representatives	<u>17</u>	<u>61%</u>
2. Non- Government Representatives	<u>8</u>	<u>25%</u>
A. Private Sector Representatives (at least 1)	<u>4</u>	
B. Stakeholder Organization Representatives (at least 1)	<u>4</u>	
3. At Large Representatives	<u>3</u>	<u>14%</u>
Total Board Membership	28	100%

EDD STRATEGY COMMITTEE ROSTER

Updated 1/4/2023

NOTE: This committee structure has been utilized by the organization since 1997 as a subset of the Board of Directors to discuss important issues and provide a representative perspective of the regional economy.

1. PRIVATE SECTOR REPRESENTATIVES

Any senior management official or executive holding a key decision-making position, with respect to any for-profit enterprise.

Name	Company	Position
Randy Weimer	Sibanye/Stillwater Mine	Environmental & Public Affairs Manager
Vacant	Sweet Grass Chamber	Director
Holly Higgins	First Interstate Bank of Hardin	Branch Manager
Marissa Hauge	Montana Family Pharmacies	Executive Director
Charlene Johnson	Plenty Doors CDC	Executive Director

2. REPRESENTATIVES OF OTHER ECONOMIC INTERESTS

Persons who provide additional representation of the main economic interests of the region. These may include, but are not limited to: public officials, community leaders, and representatives of workforce development boards, institutions of higher education, minority and labor groups, and private individuals.

Name	Area of Interest	Position
Dianne Lehm	Big Sky Economic Development	Community Outreach Director
Lorene Hintz	Small Bus. Development Ctr (SBDC)	SBDC Regional Director
Stephanie Ray	Stillwater County Planner	Stillwater County Planner
Ryan VanBallegooyen	DLI - Billings Job Service	Billings Job Service Manager

CALCULATIONS

	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Private Sector Representatives	<u>5</u>	<u>56%</u>
Representatives of Other Economic Interests	<u>4</u>	<u>44%</u>
Total Committee Membership	9	<u>100%</u>

Staff:

Beartooth RC&D / Economic Development District is a 54-year-old organization professionally staffed through funding provided by our local communities, counties, Conservation Districts, Montana Department of Agriculture, Montana Department of Commerce, and the US Dept. of Commerce EDA. By virtue of our time in business we provide excellent stability, continuity and capacity to the communities we serve. Our current staff includes three full-time positions and one part-time position.

Joel Bertolino serves as Executive Director and was hired in October 2007. He is the full-time Food and Ag Center Director. Prior to his time at Beartooth, he spent 7 years with USDA Farm Services Agency administering a variety of price support and emergency disaster programs, as well as 6 years with Carbon County Historical Society as a Historic Preservation Officer. Joel holds a B.A. in Political Science/Public Administration from Montana State University – Bozeman and has spent his life assisting with the family cattle ranch north of Red Lodge, MT that he now operates.

Nan Knight serves the organization as the full-time Finance Director providing organizational finance support, financial assistance to small businesses, and staff support to our Revolving Loan Fund Committee. She began working for Beartooth RC&D in November 2021 after spending many years working in lending and bookkeeping.

Jacy Head serves as the full-time Economic Development Director and began employment with Beartooth in August 2021. Jacy has several years of experience in retail, real estate, administration, and teaching. She is the lead staff person for the EDA program, Montana's Certified Regional Development program, and the EPA Brownfields Program. Jacy holds a B.S. degree in History and Psychology from Texas Tech University.

Myrna Lastusky serves Beartooth as a part-time Executive Assistant and joined the team in September 2020. Myrna has a B.S. in Secondary Education and a Masters degree in Curriculum & Instruction from Concordia University. With 25 years of experience as an educator and six years as an executive assistant, Myrna supports the three directors with meeting minutes, reporting requirements, communications, and other miscellaneous tasks.

Report:

In the section below, we outline our specific scope of work items for 2023 derived from our CEDS Goals and Objectives, as well as the level to which each objective was achieved. The Scope of Work and Implementation FY 2023 listed below provides a summary of our project activity and is intended to be used as a reference to this report. The Black text is from our CEDS, and the pink text covers how we implemented and achieved the outcomes in 2023.

Scope of Work and Implementation Methodology FY 2023 derived from CEDS 2022-2027

I. Maintain Eligibility with EDA.

- a. Supply the EDA with timely information on plant and large business closures and the number of employees affected. **There was a recent layoff of 100 employees with one of our largest employers in Stillwater County and the surrounding areas; majority of these jobs were at the Stillwater mine by Nye.**
- b. Submit mid-point and year-end financial reports as required.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: We submitted a timely semi-annual SF-425 document and a timely year-end SF-425 document.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES: We submitted completed ED-916 and ED-918 questionnaires.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

- c. Submit combined annual CEDS & progress report by required date.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: Beartooth staff facilitated and participated in workforce housing meetings across the region. Staff monitored and reported out on economic trends including partnering with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to survey and gauge business health. CEDS Strategy Committee meetings, Regional Roundup at board meetings, and annual project reviews with partners allow us to constantly monitor what is happening in the region and share that information with relevant parties.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Final annual CEDS update and progress report was submitted in January 2023.
- 5-year CEDS was completed and submitted in September 2022. Hard copies continue to be distributed throughout the region and a digital copy is on our website.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

- d. Strengthen and enhance our ability to provide programs and services on a regional basis which augment local community efforts through coordination, facilitation and education in the following areas:
 - Revolving Loan Fund
 - Montana Certified Regional Development Corporation
 - Montana Food and Ag Center
 - Montana Cooperative Development Program
 - Montana Main Street Program
 - Business Expansion and Retention (BEAR) Program
 - One Million Cups Program
 - Business Planning/Technical Assistance (with SBDC)
 - Brownfields Redevelopment Program (with MT DEQ and US EPA)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: Many of these programs and funding sources provide our organization with operating expenses and funding resources for clients. We

utilize these programs on an ongoing basis and we rely on these areas to accomplish our work plan and carry out our CEDS activities. Beartooth staff continue to be actively engaged throughout the region and 2023 was an extremely busy year in all areas. We are actively serving on committees and boards and assisting with projects of our partner organizations including: Big Sky EDA, Stillwater County Economic Development, Big Horn County Economic Development, Red Lodge Area Community Foundation, and Montana Economic Developers Association.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES: As in previous reports, this scope of work item is listed to reflect the various state and federal programs, as well as committees and boards, that we successfully participate on during the course of any given year. Thus, the results in this section are brief and refer to our continued eligibility, while the actual projects are referenced below in individual scope of work items.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

- e. Continue to heighten regional communication and awareness of economic development-related issues through bi-monthly Board of Directors meetings, regular updates of our website and social media channels, Board/community reports, success stories, etc.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: MOU and annual project review meetings were held with all five counties in our service area plus Cities of Laurel, Billings and Hardin. EDA CARES ACT funding was used for a regional housing assessment, economic recovery, and a targeted industry specialist to help more severely impacted sectors with recovery efforts such as those associated with travel, entertainment, and food service. BRCD staff assisted Big Horn County and Red Lodge Area Community Foundation with housing issues. Partnerships continue with community leaders on Bozeman Trail development. Staff have continued to be involved with planning and post-disaster recovery projects with our affected entities.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- 12 City Council, County Commissioners, Red Lodge Urban Renewal District, Laurel Urban Renewal District meetings were attended.
- Partnered with DEQ staff to conduct community Brownfields education trainings and public outreach.
- Incorporating CEDS strategizing and planning in MOU and Board meetings.
- Managing a USDA RCDI Grant application on behalf of Big Horn County to hire and train an Economic Development Director/Housing Coordinator. This project has been a great success and built stronger relationships with our partners in Big Horn County.
- Managing a USDA RCDI Grant application on behalf of Red Lodge Area Community Foundation to increase capacity in workforce housing. As part of this process, 12 Red Lodge Workforce Housing meetings were attended.
- 277 Facebook and LinkedIn posts sharing important grants, loans, training and other information from our region. Contact interactions were up 66% in 2023.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: The vast territory with many varying demographic factors can present difficulty in servicing the entire region and its many needs.

II. Provide and support business planning and recruitment efforts through our RLF and a high-quality technical assistance program.

- a. Provide business technical assistance to a minimum of **thirty** clients per year for business, strategic, and financial planning.
- b. Continue partnerships with the local Small Business Development Center (SBDC), the MT Dept. of Commerce, local ED specialists, the BEAR program, One Million Cups, Job Service personnel, and local institutions of higher education to provide assistance to businesses and provide access to these important programs.
- c. Provide assistance that would lead to funding from the RLF to a minimum of **two** new or existing businesses per year. EDD staff will promote and market the RLF while making technical assistance visits and providing planning assistance to business clients. Expand the RLF by marketing its services to and cooperating with commercial lenders, commercial realtors, and chambers of commerce throughout the region.
- d. Continue assistance to our local economic development partners and communities to recruit and develop businesses and manufacturers that want to locate in our region, including promotion of existing and potential new business parks.
- e. Work to develop high-quality investment options in the three designated Opportunity Zones located in the region.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: Beartooth staff participated in Leadership32 in Stillwater County to build relationships with those partners and train staff to do future Leadership programs. Participated in SBDC Resource Workshop in Hardin in collaboration with partners such as USDA, SBDC, and several others. Promoted MEDA activities and programs on Facebook. BRCD continues to advertise SBDC webinars and other trainings that might be beneficial to smaller businesses. We also work with a group of Joliet business owners and stakeholders in efforts to revitalize their town. Beartooth staff continue to collaborate with others throughout the region on a Bozeman Trail project, including collaboration with Dr. Luke Ward of Rocky Mountain College and his GIS student Emma Hardy to assist in these efforts.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Provided TA to 141 clients this year for business, strategic, and financial planning.
- 21 RLF loans managed in 2022. 4 loans were paid off.
- Discussions held with 5 clients regarding SSBCI loans. A couple of these will likely be happening in 2024.
- BRCD staff attended 12 RLACF housing meetings.
- 5 meetings were held with the Bozeman Trail regional planning group.
- 1 new position created in Big Horn County - Economic Development Director Tina Toyne was hired through our successful USDA RCDI grant, and Beartooth staff are responsible for training her.
- Recently submitted a \$750,000 IRP application to increase Beartooth's available lending amount.

- Partnered with Montana DOC on their SSBCI 2.0 program, which enabled Beartooth to mutually collaborate on two loans for businesses in our region.
- Contributed to an EDA-funded case study by EIG on persistent poverty in Big Horn County. The final report was distributed to our stakeholders in the region.
- Facilitated dissemination of disaster-relief surveys through the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis.
- Provide a letter of support to Lockwood TEDD's infrastructure project application to the EDA Disaster Recovery Program which will minimize future impacts.
- Participated in some redevelopment meetings with potential buyers hoping to renovate the old Red Lodge hospital.
- Partnering with Stillwater County on a feasibility study for a Business/Industrial Park; this study was finalized and distributed in December 2023.
- Assisted with improving development and business attraction in the City of Hardin.
- Had discussions regarding Opportunity Zones with the Red Lodge Workforce Housing Committee, Big Horn County, and the City of Hardin. Red Lodge in particular is seeking investors for affordable housing in their Opportunity Zone, but the opportunity to invest has passed, so there is very little incentive at this point.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

III. Support the development/creation of value-added industries.

- a. Continue to support the development of **one** new renewable energy project or initiative per year and monitor industry activity and progress in the region.
- b. Serve agriculture-related businesses, and value-added processing opportunities for locally grown commodities, as one of Montana's eight Food and Ag Centers. Assist a minimum of **fifteen** businesses/producers per year with value-added agriculture project planning and development, including financing for equipment, facilities and marketing. In addition, assist those businesses in utilizing technology. Work to ensure that this program is well-reported and understood so that it is well-funded by the State of Montana.
- c. Assist **two** businesses per year with cooperative business development, including co-op business model education to interested groups.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: Beartooth staff worked with several local businesses on REAP applications to upgrade coolers and electrical with more efficient energy systems. One client wants to expand his greenhouses to provide a higher volume of organic vegetables to the local market. Staff attended meetings with SBDC, Montana Dept. of Commerce, MMEC, MCDC, Big Sky EDA, College of Technology, Rock31/BEAR, and MSU-Billings to report on our programs. Value-added ag businesses were assisted and referred as needed to appropriate partner service providers.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Provided TA or grant application assistance to 30 new and existing agriculture-related and value-added processing businesses, including:
 - Special K Ranch
 - Wild Bison Ranch
 - Yellowstone Pasta Co.

- Crazy Mountain Coffee Roasters
 - Becky's Berries
 - Alaskan Seafood Guys
 - Stable Feeds – Sainfoin pellet production
 - Valley Farmers Supply
 - Speedy and Flo's Sweet Corn
 - Carbon County Meats – local meat processor
 - Greycliff Mill – expansion of water-powered gristmill, greenhouse, and cheese cave
 - Helping Hands Food Bank
 - Fishtail General Store
 - Oswald Farms
 - S-Ranch Meats
 - Blue Creek Marbled Meat Co.
 - Undammed Distilling Co.
 - Yellowstone Valley Farms
- Applied to and were awarded the CTAP Lead Service Line TA to provide assistance to our communities in identifying lead service lines and guiding them in the next steps to safer drinking water.
 - Provided TA to value-added businesses on potential RLF loans including a new mercantile/BBQ/campground in Roberts and a beef producer for equipment and expansion of his business in Big Horn County and Billings.
 - 4 Growth Through Ag grants submitted, 2 in Yellowstone County, 1 in Big Horn County, and 1 in Sweet Grass County.
 - Assisted Oswald Farms in a \$250,000 VAPG application that was awarded to them in May.
 - Conducted face-to-face outreach with clients & toured their facilities with representatives of regional MMEC and SBDC. Businesses toured include:
 - Fishtail General Store
 - Yellowstone Valley Farms
 - Oswald Farms
 - Yellowstone Pasta Co.
 - Wild Bison Ranch
 - Alaskan Seafood Guys
 - Montana Prime Meats
 - Special K Ranch
 - Charter Ranch
 - Becky's Berries
 - Ranch House Meats
 - Beartooth staff served on the MEDA Spring Conference planning committee, and the entire staff attended the conference.
 - Regional trainings are promoted on our Facebook and LinkedIn pages, including those through SBDC, Big Sky EDA, Montana DOC, Rock31, Montana FADC, City College, and more.

IV. Provide community and economic development planning and facilitation.

- a. Provide technical assistance that would lead to funding for a minimum of **three** clients per year engaging in planning activities such as feasibility studies, building expansion, and industrial growth.
- b. Continue providing facilitation assistance to community projects through services offered such as project coordination, community organizing, and work as a liaison. Assist **two** community-based planning projects per year, including public facility enhancement.
- c. Work with partner entities to identify ways to enhance workforce development efforts throughout the region, and specifically in rural areas.
- d. Educate and assist at least **one** community per year with economic resiliency and diversification.
- e. Assist at least **one** community per year with a Community Review or leveraging of the do-it-yourself community review tools available through the Montana Economic Developers Association program.
- f. Assist at least **one** underserved community to advance equity through the development of investments that directly benefit that community.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: There were many contacts, projects, and applications that fall under this goal's umbrella, from our work with community groups to grant and loan applications to committee participation. Although we will not hear the results of some applications until spring, we are hopeful they will be successful so we can increase assistance, especially in Big Horn County where the Crow and Northern Cheyenne have great needs, as well as in the flood-impacted areas of our region. Beartooth has reestablished itself as the region's Brownfields liaison, in affiliation with Montana's DEQ, which has reignited interest in addressing blighted/contaminated property and reusing in-fill properties instead of greenspace. Staff have coordinated with the two tribal Brownfields programs to more efficiently strategize on sites and other mutually beneficial aspects of their programs. Beartooth applied to be a RCAC subgrantee under HUD's Building Rural Economies program and was recently notified that this application was successful. This program will be targeting the City of Columbus as well as all rural communities in Stillwater and the rest of our region.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- BSTF grant management for Stillwater County Business/Industrial Park feasibility study.
- Ongoing work with Joliet Beautification Committee to revitalize their Main Street and create community development events.
- Wrote and managed Montana Disaster Recovery Grants through the Montana Community Foundation to assist 18 different businesses and organizations throughout our region.
- Staff participated in Red Lodge Workforce Housing Committee meetings each month. We also coordinated strategy meetings for potential projects in our disaster-impacted counties and cities to better equip them if they chose to pursue EDA Disaster Recovery funding.

- Assisted the Worden Senior group in Yellowstone County in strategizing and planning for a senior housing development.
- Discussed and assisted historical buildings in the Red Lodge Historical District such as the Carbon County Historical Society and Museum and the Roman Theater regarding building improvements and strategizing for funding.
- We were awarded an RMAP loan through USDA that provides \$400,000 in microlending for our RLF to assist small business owners. It will also provide up to \$100,000 in technical assistance and training over the next 3 years, which will be a huge help to employees and employers in our region.
- We were awarded a Community-wide Brownfields assessment grant through EPA for \$460,000 to perform assessments on properties that may have contamination. This program will allow many potential commercial businesses or high-density residential properties to build or renovate.
- Managing a Brownfields Phase II Assessment for Helping Hands Food Bank in Hardin. The food bank is awaiting next steps and recommendations from DEQ's cleanup staff, which will hopefully involve the Petrofund.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

V. Assist communities in providing the necessary infrastructure to maintain their quality of life and support future development.

- Assist **one** county or municipality per year in the assessment of their workforce housing needs to identify gaps in the types and numbers of housing units required in order to meet workforce housing needs. Assist in the creation or update of a plan of action that encourages private investment in the development of new housing or redevelopment of existing housing stock in order to meet workforce housing needs within their jurisdiction.
- Work with our cities, towns and counties to develop affordable housing, including: redevelopment of existing properties, use of vacant local government-owned property, self-help housing projects, and local developer investment. Maintain partnerships with organizations such as NeighborWorks, HRDC, HomeWORD, etc. for the development of these opportunities.
- Assist communities in the region with **one** public infrastructure project per year, including Broadband, through project planning, financing, administration, etc.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: We have had a great deal of direct and indirect assistance on infrastructure through grant management, discussions, sharing of tools and resources, support of local efforts, and dissemination of information. In particular, our work on housing issues has led into discussions on zoning and other policies, the need for improved infrastructure, and city/county plans for future growth.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Assisted Town of Lodge Grass with a Coal Board application to provide funding for infrastructure needs.
- Assisted Town of Roberts with planning and funding opportunities for their water and sewer board.

- Provided letter of support requesting funding from Montana Board of Housing for a Mitchell Court development in Billings; this project received funding & is progressing.
- Assisted Carbon County with Coal Board application for further program planning and operating costs for CART (Carbon County Area Ride & Transit).
- Connected Big Horn County Economic Development to HUD's LISC program to provide technical assistance in creating a countywide housing needs assessment.
- Provided grant to Plenty Doors CDC on the Crow reservation to replace well caps and other infrastructure to provide clean and safe drinking water for residents.
- Awarded a grant to the City of Hardin to assist them in updating their CIP.
- Managed USDA RCDI grant on behalf of RLACF to increase workforce housing capacity in Red Lodge.
- Research and discussions with Carbon County Commissioners, RLACF, and other entities regarding a potential port authority or housing authority.
- Research and discussions with Big Horn County Commissioners and the City of Hardin regarding their affordable housing issues and potential solutions for development. Assisted their Economic Development Director in writing a CDBG application for a housing needs study and provided a letter of support.
- Monthly participation and TA in Red Lodge Workforce Housing Committee.
- Applied for and received grants for Sibanye-Stillwater Foundation and Walmart Community Foundation to purchase OWLs to better facilitate virtual and hybrid meetings throughout our region.
- Letter of support submitted to Red Lodge Area Community Foundation for an ARPA grant to provide funds for community childcare needs.
- Participation in community meetings continued for site selection and input on their affordable housing feasibility study. One site was a local vacant property owned by Carbon County and another is owned by the City of Red Lodge. Top selection was a privately-owned plot next to Roberts School. Water & utilities are in place, but sewage infrastructure will need work.
- Participated in discussions with the City of Red Lodge regarding their vacant lot and the other underutilized properties in their Urban Renewal District. In addition, there have been discussions about the URD accomplishing its highest objective of workforce housing.
- With our support and encouragement, Big Horn County decided to join the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority to heighten chances of redevelopment in their train depot and increase economic development. Big Horn is now one of 19 Montana counties that are part of BSPRA and they are promoting it to other counties as well.
- Meetings and ongoing discussions and planning with many private developers interested in creating affordable housing opportunities or developing commercial properties throughout our region.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None

VI. Assist communities with upgrading community services and their facilities to improve the standard of living.

- a. Assist a minimum of **two** communities per year with building, trails, and park projects through a combination of planning, public meeting facilitation and grant assistance.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: We were able to provide assistance to multiple communities with outdoor projects and have many more coming in the year ahead with our newly awarded Brownfields funding.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Submitted Letter of Support for the Federal Lands Access Program for Carbon County's reconstruction of East Rosebud Creek Road.
- Beartooth was awarded a Montana Disaster Recovery Grant, which we subgranted to applicants who serve disaster-impacted communities and vulnerable populations. Here are just a few of the 18 subgrants we awarded:
 - Fishtail Community Council is creating a natural playground that will also prevent future flooding each spring.
 - Stillwater Valley Watershed conducted a study to assess past flooding and form a plan to prevent future floods.
 - Town of Lodge Grass sustained regular flooding due to a culvert that was too small to handle heavy rains. They were able to do site prep and purchase a larger culvert to prevent future flooding.
 - Belfry Neighbors Helping Neighbors bought street lamps to provide safer, well-lit streets.
 - Plenty Doors CDC replaced well caps and other broken equipment that contributed to Crow Agency's unsanitary water. Residents now have access to clean and safe drinking water.
 - Multiple communities (Big Timber, Joliet, Ballantine) utilized their grant money to provide food and services to vulnerable populations.
- Oversaw the redevelopment process of the old Rocky Fork Inn property in Red Lodge. This property will be redeveloped into a complementing green space and an ADA fishing access point once the ownership is transferred to the City of Red Lodge.
- Assisted in writing a grant application to upgrade lighting in the City of Hardin fairgrounds.
- Continued involvement with the Sandstone School group and provided assistance as needed. They are moving forward in redevelopment efforts to broaden childcare in the community of Absarokee.
- Facilitated discussions with Roberts School personnel, community foundation leaders, and a local architect to explore options for renovating Roberts School and getting it on the Historical Buildings registry.
- Assisted a property owner in Red Lodge who is acquiring the old Sunset Mine site. The owner intends to develop additional housing and allow for a walking trail easement, which will further extend Red Lodge's trail system.
- Working with the City of Hardin to apply to the Brownfields program for redeveloping a high-density residential site for police, firefighters, medical personnel, and teachers.

- Continued fiscal management of Custer Gallatin Working Group grant for facilitation of stakeholders interested in forest management policies.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: None.

- VII. Partner with local economic developers to promote the technology industry, especially tech entrepreneurs and tech worker programs.**
- a. Research regarding State Tech Entrepreneur programs, including Montana Tech Accelerator Series.
 - b. Provide technical assistance to tech entrepreneurs that would lead to funding, with a goal of **two** clients per year.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS ACHIEVED: Staff have been researching all of the different technology programs for how they could be best utilized in our area. Although we have not provided TA to any tech entrepreneurs this year, we have been engaging with the Montana Business Attraction team on attracting more businesses to our area with an emphasis on technology.

QUANTIFY DELIVERABLES:

- Beartooth staff continue our involvement in the Bozeman Trail project where we are developing historically accurate maps of the route using GIS, Google Earth, OnX, and other platforms. As part of these efforts, an ultimate goal is to develop a phone app that locals and tourists could utilize to follow the trail on public lands. There will be tales from Bozeman Trail journals and other interesting information to read about, watch on video, and listen to as they journey along. The group acquired a \$20,000 grant from a private source to offset expenses as we continue this partnership with both Montana and Wyoming entities.
- Staff participated and facilitated a few different meetings regarding a potential business that is interested in bringing a patented Catalytic Depolymerization plant to the Hardin Industrial Park.

DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED: This is the goal we have had the least success in accomplishing, as tech entrepreneurs are typically looking in other directions for assistance and funding. Additionally, Montana has many issues with broadband, which discourages interest in development in our region. We will continue to search out opportunities in the future.

Evaluation:

1. Number of jobs created after implementation of CEDS, in 2023:

Fifty (50) FTE jobs in the region were created as a direct result of services provided through BRCD within the fiscal year. Twenty-nine (29) of these jobs were created through BRCD's Revolving Loan Fund.

2. Number and types of investments undertaken in the region:

Beartooth assisted clients in business planning, RLF, and grant applications that resulted in almost \$6 million of investment into our region. Over \$3 million of this was from public

funds. Value-added ag producers continue to invest in expansions of operations. Although inflation and interest rates have been a deterrent, we have seen a surprising number of clients interested in starting small businesses or revamping old businesses or buildings. If the affordable housing issue and available workforce can be properly addressed, business activity will continue to grow.

3. Number of jobs retained in the region:

191 jobs in the region were retained as a direct result of services provided by BRCD within the fiscal year. One hundred and twenty (120) jobs were retained in Yellowstone County; Thirteen (13) jobs were retained in Carbon County; six (6) jobs were retained in Big Horn County; forty-four (44) jobs were retained in Sweet Grass County; Eight (8) jobs were retained in Stillwater County.

4. Amount of private sector investments in the region after implementation of the CEDS:

Within the BRCD region, we have seen enormous growth from our many private sector investments but specific data is very difficult to obtain in rural areas. In 2023, Beartooth was directly involved with over \$6 million of projects in the region; \$2,798,848 of the funds utilized in the projects were private.

5. Changes in the economic environment of the region:

Our region continues to battle with the same concerns as the previous year: lack of access to childcare, housing, broadband, mental health, and available workforce. Billings and Yellowstone County has the highest likelihood of attracting the most entrepreneurs and new businesses since it's more urban than the surrounding areas. Big Horn County and the Crow Reservation struggle with persistent-poverty issues and a declining coal industry, so it is a continual challenge to entice business owners to invest here. Carbon County's economy is dependent upon tourism which has proven to be a temperamental industry. With such diverse conditions across the region, the economic environment is constantly changing and evolving.

With the 500-year flood in June 2022, the disaster impacted four of the five counties in our region and the area continues to recover from the lasting effects. Several businesses demonstrated tremendous resiliency as they have tried to persevere with a more successful summer than the last, but sadly, many businesses have also struggled. In addition, another disaster occurred in Stillwater County when a train derailed into the Yellowstone River in June 2023.

Montana continues to see a heightened interest in tourism due to the countless television shows and movies over the years that have featured the state. With the airlines and airports creating more expedited routes for travelers to Billings and other bigger Montana cities, this has also helped with the facilitation of the growth in this sector.

6. Unemployment:

Montana's unemployment rate remained low in 2023 with 3.0% in November 2023. The national unemployment rate at the end of 2023 was 3.7%. All 5 counties have unemployment rates between 2.1-3.9%; Stillwater County had the lowest with 2.1%. Big Horn County, our most impoverished county, showed great improvement, going from 6.7% unemployment at

the end of 2021 to 3.9% in November 2023. These statistics show the labor force is getting back to work after the pandemic, but employers in our region still struggle to find enough workers.

7. Median Household Income:

According to US Census Bureau information, Montana as a state reported 2022 MHI (the most recent available) at \$66,341 which has increased approximately \$5,711 from 2021. Median Household Income in the region is as follows through 2022: Big Horn County \$52,463 (up \$9,640 from 2021), Carbon County \$66,780 (up \$4,315 from 2021), Stillwater County \$78,380 (up \$5,336 from 2021), Sweet Grass County \$64,872 (up \$6,126 from 2021), and Yellowstone \$72,300 (up \$13,926 from 2021).

8. Changing Demographics:

The graph below shows that the population continues to grow in each county other than Big Horn County. Four of five counties have increased in population since 2010, with very modest growth. Perceptions across the region have been that we are flooded with newcomers since 2020. The national percent change from 2020 to 2021 was only .5%, so all counties other than Big Horn are well ahead of that curve. The national poverty percentage is 11.5%, so four counties are below that level with Big Horn County well above it. Big Horn is one of four persistent poverty counties in the state.

County	2020 Population	2022 Population	% Change	Under 18: % of Population	Over 65:% of Population	% in Poverty
Big Horn	13,127	12,851	-2.1%	2.4%	13.5%	22.8%
Carbon	10,476	11,179	6.7%	7.4%	27.1%	9.2%
Stillwater	8,959	9,177	2.4%	0.4%	24.9%	9.6%
Sweet Grass	3,677	3,715	1.0%	8.9%	28.6%	10.2%
Yellowstone	164,722	169,852	3.1%	2.8%	18.0%	9.3%

*Source: US Census Bureau

***% Change compares April 2020 to July 2022

9. Diversity Index:

The chart compiled below shows the difference in the Diversity Index over the past 13 years. There has been a significant increase in diversity in four of our counties with Big Horn County staying almost the same over that time period.

County	2010 Diversity Index #	2023 Diversity Index #	Change in 13 years
Big Horn	51.4	53	1.6
Carbon	7.9	18	10.1
Stillwater	9.1	22	12.9

Sweet Grass	8.5	21	12.5
Yellowstone	21.9	38	16.1

*Data taken from <https://montana.hometownlocator.com/mt> (2023 data) and for 2010 data <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-the-united-states-2010-and-2020-census.html>

Schedule:

Please see Attachment A for the Schedule.

Acronym List for Schedule:

Implementation Partners
BSED- Big Sky Economic Development
BHC- Big Horn County
BRCD - Beartooth RC&D
CCHSM - Carbon County Historical Society & Museum
DBA - Downtown Billings Alliance
DEQ - Dept. of Environmental Quality
DLI - Dept of Labor & Industries
EIG- Economic Innovation Group
EPA - Environmental Protection Agency
FADC-Food and Ag Development Center
GOED-Governor's Office of Economic Development
HRDC - Human Resources Development Council
LBHC - Little Big Horn College
LDO-Local Development Organization
LWCF- Montana Land Water Conservation Fund
MBOH- Montana Board of Housing
MCDC- Montana Cooperative Development Center
MDOA-Montana Development of Agriculture
MDOC- Montana Department of Commerce
MDOT - Montana Dept. of Transportation
MEDA-Montana Economic Developers Association
MFFA- Montana Facility Finance Authority
MNA - Montana Nonprofits Association
MTCF- Montana Community Foundation
NaCo-National Association of Counties

NADC- Native American Development Corporation
NADO- National Association Development Corporation
NRMEDD - N. Rocky Mountain Economic Development District
RLACF-Red Lodge Area Community Foundation
RL WFH Com - Red Lodge Workforce Housing Committee
SBDC- Small Business Development Center
SCED- Stillwater County Economic Development
SGCC- Sweet Grass Chamber of Commerce
SGCF - Sweet Grass Community Foundation
TEDD- Tribal Economic Development
USDA-RD - US Dept of Agriculture-Rural Development