**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**January 18, 2024 – 1:00 pm**

**Big Sky Economic Development Conference Room**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Lorene Hintz, SBDC

Kayla Vokral, SBDC

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service

Commissioner Steve Riveland, Stillwater County

Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

Emily Schneller, Congressman Rosendale’s Office

Josiah Porcel, Sen. Tester’s Office

Danny Choriki, City of Billings

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe, Montana Dept. of Labor & Industry

**Guests**: J.B. Farley, AgriOrganics

Andy Rahn, Montana Land Source

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

Tina Toyne, Big Horn County/City of Hardin EDD

Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County Planner

Heidi Sparks, Laurel City Council

Brent Moore, City of Red Lodge

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

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

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

**Review November Board Minutes (Action): Holly Higgins motioned to approve; Commissioner Miller seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:**

**Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**

* Fentanyl Act – Sen. Tester unwavering efforts to address border crisis and fentanyl. Some crazy stuff has been happening with it on the Crow Reservation. Senator calls it a national emergency, wants to hold China accountable, and support law enforcement with necessary tools. He wants Congress to support his bi-partisan Fentanyl Act to impose economic sanctions on those involved in international fentanyl trafficking. Montana law enforcement are supportive of this legislation.
* Colstrip: Senator is working to lower costs by urging Biden admin to reconsider a proposed rule that would increase energy prices and negatively impact grid reliability. Letter signed by Senators Sinema and Mannchen. Called on EPA for final rules for emissions that won’t raise costs for Montanans and keep Colstrip up and running.
* Urging congressional leaders to pass his bi-partisan bill to address the acquisition of agricultural land from foreign adversaries. China has tried to purchase land near US military bases and other sensitive areas. We need to stop China, Iran, N. Korea, Russia from acquiring U.S. farmland.

**Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale)**

* Big news: 20 weeks pregnant – baby boy coming in June!
* Budget: Funding for 4 bills was extended until tomorrow.
* Congress working to pass a continuing resolution. Senate passed and House will vote tonight. Government shutdown unlikely now.
  + Congressman Rosendale thinks the Senate should be funded by separate appropriation bills and the budget crisis needs to be addressed – can’t keep kicking the can down the road. He’s also been outspoken about shutting down the government if the southern border is not addressed and shut down. He will not be voting for the continuing resolution. Reach out to Emily with any questions.
* Congressman’s Land Act was recently introduced to protect American farmland – similar to what Josiah was saying.

Ryan commented on how valuable it is to have our congressional reps at Beartooth Board meetings, hearing what is going on in their world and having them take our concerns back to congressional leaders.

Myrna seconded this – said we’ve never had 3 reps who have been so diligent in attending meetings and also offering their support for any of our needs.

**Treasurer/Financial Reports: Nan Knight**

**RLF Financials (ACTION)**

* Page 10: Dec 2023 financials for RLF. Between Beartooth and the RLF, we are sitting at 11 bank accounts right now.
* In December one Yellowstone County loan was paid off.
* We submitted an application for a new $750,000 IRP revolving loan fund in December. We will possibly hear by end of February if we’ll be awarded.
* 3 potential RMAP loans – 1 in Stillwater, 1 in Yellowstone, 1 in Big Horn County.

**RC&D Financials (ACTION)**

* When Nan started at Beartooth, we went to a 4-year comparison for Beartooth books.
* 2024 budget is already a little different than what is shown on page 11. CRDC contract just came in at $82,000, so our numbers will be a little higher than shown.
* 1 CRDC dropped out this year, so the money was spread out a bit. We went from $71,000 in the past to $82,000.

**Holly Higgins motioned to approve the RLF financials. Kayla Vokral seconded. Motion passed.**

**Holly Higgins motioned to approve the RC&D financials. Kayla Vokral seconded. Motion passed.**

**Executive Committee Nominations**

* Ryan, Melanie, and Marissa are willing to keep doing – Ryan as Chair, Melanie as Vice-Chair, & Marissa as Treasurer. Anyone want to be an alternate? We could sure use 1 or 2.
* Zoom is an option for meetings
* Scott Miller and Holly Higgins volunteered to be alternates.

**ACTION: Kayla Vokral motioned to keep the current members and approve the 2 new appointees. Lorene Hintz seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff COLA**

* Looked at the budget and are trying to keep up with inflation; we have Myrna doing some more difficult tasks than originally intended. Ryan applied his Job Service knowledge with pay scales. Executive Committee reviewed the numbers and recommended approval for an 8% increase. We have been adding programs and funding, so are able to do that with no problem.
* Nan: Included in that discussion was to move Myrna to salary of 30 hours/week and prorate her benefits. Her increase will be $2 flat to get her a little closer to where she should be.

**ACTION: Commissioner Miller motioned to approve these increases. Holly Higgins seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Food and Ag Program – Joel Bertolino**

Page 12:

* Growth Through Ag (GTA) grants preliminary applications were due in October. Joel has been working with 3 that made it to the second round and were asked for full applications.
* GTA full apps were due on Jan. 8th and all got them in. Interviews will be on Feb. 14th.
* RFSI was new funding that Dept of Ag received for increasing food chain stability, and we had 2 applicants for sure.

Growth Through Ag (GTA) and USDA Projects:

* Yellowstone Pasta – GTA applicant to expand biz
* Oswald Farms – received VAPG last year, still working through.
* Speedy & Flo’s Sweet Corn – Tina Toyne, Lorene, & Kayla helped them get their full application in for a greenhouse and a retail front in Hardin.
* Greycliff Mill – applied to RFSI for funding to expand their food processing and increase equipment.
* Yellowstone Valley Farms – Reuben Stahl put in RFSI application; also interested in a REAP application.
* Rodi Farms – Carah Ronan referred to us to assist in her RFSI applications to expand fresh flowers/fresh vegetables business near Laurel.
* J&D Meats – Hardin
* Undammed Distilling – Billings

Ongoing Projects:

* Montana Prime Meats
* Primitive Meats
* Becky’s Berries

FADC Outreach:

* Alaskan Seafood Guys – did a visit with Lane Gobbs from MMEC.
* Ranch House Meats – visited their new location in Lockwood.

Initial Contact:

* Monette Farms – Big Horn County. Reference from Danny Choriki.
* Stovall Ranch – Yellowstone County. Referral from Dept. of Ag.

**Economic Development / CRDC – Jacy Head**

* BSTF – will change to Montana Growth Fund. There will be planning grants and low-interest loans under the MGF.
  + Stillwater County Industrial/Business Park Feasibility Study was completed and closed on Jan. 10, 2024.
* USDA RCDI grants in Carbon and Big Horn: training continues with Angela Getchell and Tina Toyne. We transitioned those over to Myrna in the last quarter.
* CRDC should be set until it sunsets.
* Helping Hands Food Bank – waiting on DEQ for release status and next steps in qualifying them for the PetroFund.
* Rocky Fork Inn site in Red Lodge: Waiting on FEMA to complete buyout process so we can move forward with the disposal and demo of the building.
* Lodge Grass Lumberyard site: Priority site identified in our Brownfields grant. Pursued with DEQ’s assessment funds instead our Beartooth’s. Working with them on that.
* Community-wide Brownfields Assessment Grant – RFP released for hiring contractors/Qualified Environmental Professionals (QEPs); need to create a Brownfields Steering Committee. If anyone is willing to be involved in that, please reach out to Jacy. Our Brownfields region is the 5-county region excluding Billings (BSED also has a Brownfields program).
* DEQ Brownfields Collaboration – Beartooth is 1 of 3 selected to be a sub-recipient to one of DEQ’s new capacity-building grants. The scope of work will align with our Community-wide Brownfields Assessment grant. Will provide more funding to get boots on the ground.
* RCAC Building Rural Economies (BRE) Program – recently awarded this 3-year grant as a sub-recipient. Target communities are Columbus and other communities in Stillwater and entire region. RCAC is a nationwide organization, and Amity Rembold with them is a great trainer and will be working with us to roll this out. Contracts will happen in February.
  + Identify and implement comprehensive community economic development activities.
  + Bridge project planning and implementation to create momentum needed for success.
  + Train and support local entrepreneurs working to start or expand businesses
  + Access capital for economic development and entrepreneurship
* DOC-Business Attraction: still working on Project Quartz and Black Diamond, who are both looking at the Hardin Industrial Park for their business.
* MEDA Spring conference in Red Lodge – April 24-25 at Roosevelt Center.
* Trainings in upcoming year – work with SBDC on training collaborations. Lorene and Kayla are setting up some trainings throughout our area.
* Additional clients assisted (Nov 2023-Jan 2024):
  + Roman Theater
  + City of Red Lodge
  + Sandstone School

**Operations Support – Myrna Lastusky**

* Beartooth Annual Impact Report for 2023 – pass out copies
* Montana Disaster Recovery Grant program through Montana Community Foundation – 2 copies of our final report if anyone wants to see all the good that money did throughout our region.
* RCDI-RL: Working on housing in Carbon County – lots of changes and will update another time.
* RCDI-BHC: Tina is doing great work. Submitted a CDBG grant for a housing needs study, working on a wayfinding project, and lots more.

**Regional Roundup:**

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

* A lot of property on the west end of town where we could do housing has been sold. No one seems to know who bought it, but they bought several large parcels – some is zoned residential, some business. Not sure what will happen with that.
* To the northeast of town, the Heritage folks were going to put in a subdivision. That should happen in March and will help ease the burden on our housing market. We all have a housing shortage with no place for workers to live.
* Lot of things moving under the surface.

**Brent Moore, City of Red Lodge:**

* Red Lodge Mountain finally getting some snow.
* New mayor and several new councilmembers, new PW Director, looking for a new Planning Director – lots of change in terms of leadership, and we’ll see where that takes us.

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

* 3 Brothers is now The Outlaw Café, and Allen (owner) has the theater up and running. Great for the community to have an option for entertainment.
* J&D Meats decided to stop their lunch. They were providing a one-option lunch each day and stopped for now. Hope it comes back.
* CDBG Planning Grant for a county-wide housing needs assessment – waiting to hear back.
* Wayfinding Grant was received awhile back – but Drew and Tina are working on a RFP.
* Business Attraction work that Jacy mentioned.
* Had a site visit from HUD-LISC to interview 15 stakeholders regarding their needs. Will be meeting with them in early February to hear their thoughts.

**Commissioner Steve Riveland, Stillwater County:**

* Working to finish up some major road projects with an EDA grant.
* New Stillwater County Pavilion is open and doing a lot of events – had a winter festival there before Christmas. Have an ice skating rink there.
* Steph is kicking off an ADA-compliant courthouse project to put in an elevator.
* 80 megawatt wind farm will be starting in April.

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

* Lady wants to put some mobile homes in a tract of land to bring some more homes in if that goes through.
* Big Horn River is flooding due to ice jams, so quite a few fields are flooded out.
* Bear’s Truck Stop closed. Neither Holly nor Tina know what is happening.
* Love’s Truck Stop has the RV spots just about finished; includes a basketball court, etc.

**Kayla Vokral / Lorene Hintz, Small Business Development Center:**

* Rocky Mountain Vista College is opening a vet school; partnering with the zoo. Rocky Mountain College has a pre-vet program and this will help funnel those kids locally.
* Doing trainings, partnering with Beartooth to do some financial trainings.
* Just got board approval for True Space Academy. Headquartered out of Denver, but the CEO is from Helena, Montana. Notable exits from Xerox and Travelocity. He studied 3000 businesses for 10 years to find formula for productive business growth. His data is backed by Gallup (to have it backed by Gallup, you have to go to court to get it approved). Working with him and learning about his program, we feel very confident in bringing it here.
  + Costs $5500 per business - 6 month academy, assessment of team, and working through the formula for their business.
  + Any existing businesses of 3+ years, $500K+ revenue in growth mindset – pass on to Kayla
  + Launch date is Feb. 22nd
* Launching our Founders Meeting. Next Thursday is a presenter who created an AI platform that will go through applications and different tasks. The AI will read questions out loud, then the applicant responds verbally to it, and it gets phone screenings out of the way.
* Ag Appreciation Banquet next Friday (per Ryan V).

**Danny Choriki, City of Billings:**

* Major focus in City is around public safety – several hearings on the issue. Focus last Monday was on Prevention. Danny’s biggest takeaway is there are a whole bunch of programs out there that are disconnected and may not even know the other exists. Pre-Covid people had a “rolodex” of contacts to reach out to, but that is no more. The City is looking at options for updating technology and communications between entities.
* Talk about asking County Commissioners to increase the mill levy for mental health. $300 million the State needs to do something with. Huge gap. And having mental health issues just taken to the county jail is not a good long-term solution.
* School District – new superintendent has many new ideas to broaden opportunities for high school students in terms of careers. One option is to take Washington School (downtown/midtown area) and turn from elementary into high school and have it focus on Information Technology and Communications Technology. Kind of like having more specialized career centers.
* County put out an architect to look at a plan for what the City Council asked for, which was a municipal holding center at the County Jail. Architect said it will cost 3.3 million. We need to find the money if we are going to do it. City and County are actively working together on this project.

**Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County:**

* Picking up where Danny left off on the County Jail project . . .
* Looking at 72-hour hold and must see a judge before you are released.
* County has to pay all medical expenses when we put someone in jail.
* Hope this will be a deterrent.
* Will have 30-40 beds for these short-term holds to slow criminals down a little bit. Quick release times are very dispiriting to the police when the crooks beat them out the door.
* Probably 12-18 months before we do it. Cost will be close to $5 million with architectural fees and everything else put together.
* Also looking at expanding long-term beds in the County Jail – will hire a consultant to look at what we need. Short-term beds will always be a need, and the arraignment court will process those people out and figure out what to do with them.
* Building will go up quickly. Not cheap but well worth it. Will be connected on one of current jail facilities.
* Will be located as part of the County Jail.
* Might make it 2 stories – add a second floor now and then build it out later on.
* Commissioner Miller offered any help Carbon County can give.
* Our biggest liability is our jail – there are a lot more mental health issues that end up in the jails.

**Rep. Kerri Seekins-Crowe, Department of Labor:**

* As an engagement specialist for Dept of Labor, Kerri is very focused on the re-entry side for prisoners.
* Have become grant manager for the Proud To federal grant – hoping the processes on the federal side will also help on State side.
* Will help Dept of Labor, Dept of Corrections, Parole, Dept of Education . . . helping with pre-release, continuum of care, education. Our community colleges are doing a great job in helping not just re-entry but the general public.
* Have stackable credits or shorter-term training to get people in the workforce more quickly – CAN, welding construction.
* Proud To grant – apprenticeship is the big focus. Goal is to put into place processes that we can also use in the State as they come out of Dept of Corr. Recidivism rate is 34%, but some of that stat is people going in and out with pre-release, Beta program, etc.
* Housing and Mental Health are big issues, but not dealing with at this moment – just focusing on training and jobs right now.
* What she is asking is to find businesses who will be sponsors for apprenticeships from the justice system. Many employers are reluctant to hire someone from justice system. Understand that, but we are also struggling with workforce, community stability, family stability, especially in Billings and Great Falls.
* Will help businesses to understand education-wise how we can help and support them.
* When someone is preparing for release, there will be a process for accountability. When someone is done with DOC, they are dropped, no longer their problem. So how can DOL provide wraparound services? Education – continuum of care as we deal with housing, mental health, social services, etc.
* Please send Kerri names of companies that might be willing to speak with her about this. Even ones that are NOT willing to participate, Kerri would like to speak with them to see what part of it won’t work for them or what didn’t work well in the past.
* Trying to provide possibilities for people who are just getting out of prison.
* Give businesses Kerri’s number: 406-208-6587 Kerri Seekins-Crowe – any company who is willing to talk about the program with Kerri.
* Several minutes of discussion in the room – what has worked in other states, what has been tried before, other needs that can’t be addressed with this particular program, etc.
* Ryan: These programs have been shown to work for a long time – just have to figure out a system that can work. It definitely takes a community. One of Montana’s challenges is we have a lack of Economies of Scale, so it’s a real challenge here. But there are some great jobs with short-term training (like CNAs now).

**Scott Miller, Carbon County Commission:**

* Red Lodge airport has 6, possibly 7, new hangars coming in. Airport is growing. There is now fuel available at the airport.
* Good relationship with the newly elected officials in Red Lodge. Airport Board and Fair Board and City and County all now get along.
* Red Lodge Rodeo Committee – of 700 rodeos in the PRCA, Red Lodge is the #1 rodeo. Millions of dollars and more cowboys coming, stands will get bigger.
* Bridges: Brent’s firm really helped us and we have people driving across bridges again. Cost $7 million, and FEMA should be reimbursing us. Pretty much recovered from the floods.
* Bridger: New truck stop coming in and will hire more people. Will have a restaurant, convenience store, and semi parking.
* Oswald Meats and Carbon County Meats are both killing it – nothing but good news coming out of them. Beartooth has really helped both of them.
* Fromberg: County is helping the Fromberg City Council put in a $700,000 project on the river to help protect the bridge and the water pumps that are down there, which in turn will protect the town. We are putting in about 50-80 feet of riprap in the river to protect it. Project will kick off soon.
* Tomahawk Bar in Fromberg: 2 guys from the mine bought it and it’s opened up and the restaurant is packed every night.
* 3 bars/restaurants – Roberts, Joliet, and Edgar Bar – all changed hands recently or are being sold and bought. Business is good.
* Lot of housing and subdivisions going in, going from 80 acres to 20 acres to 10 acres and planting houses – so a lot of people moving in; sanitarian is very busy. County is growing.
* If you know any nurses, our County Health Dept is hiring.
* The Health Department, schools, senior centers are all doing great in Carbon County.

**Next Beartooth RC&D Area, Inc. Board of Directors Meeting: March 21, 2024 – Big Horn County**

**Meeting adjourned at 2:27 pm.**