**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**March 16, 2023 – 1:00 pm**

**Big Horn County Courthouse**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Ryan VanBallegooyen, Billings Job Service

Tina Toyne, BHC / City of Hardin Economic Development Director

Kayla Vokral, SBA

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Emily Schneller, Rep. Rosendale

Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin

**Members** **via Zoom:**

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Jacob Cote, City of Red Lodge

Chris Mehus, Sweet Grass Conservation District

Danny Choriki, City of Billings

Commissioner Mark Morse, Yellowstone County

Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines

Josiah Porcel, Sen. Tester

Mayor Joe Purcell, City of Hardin

**Guests:**

Jason Seyler, DEQ

Wally Jemmings, DEQ

**Meeting Called to Order:** Chair VanBallegooyen called the meeting to order.

**Pledge of Allegiance, Introduction of Members and Guests:** Jacy introduced Jason Seyler and Wally Jemmings of Dept of Environmental Quality (DEQ), who are present to discuss the Brownfields program with us.

**Review January Board Minutes (Action): Melanie motioned, Holly seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:**

* **Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**
  + Sen. Tester wrote letter to Federal Reserve chairman Jay Powell urging regulators to hold Silicon County Bank executives accountable and use every tool possible to claw back bonuses they received.
  + Sen. Tester wrote a letter to CMS to address shortage of medical professionals in rural America. He pressed the agency to address the imbalance of residency slots that go to rural and underserved communities.
  + Sen. Tester, as Chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, teamed up with Sen. Moran of Kansas to introduce the Veterans Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment Bill to increase the rates of compensation for veterans and military survivors under the VA.
* **Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines)**
  + Debt ceiling – critical for admin to negotiate with Congress regarding our $31+ trillion debt. Best estimate to resolve this is mid-June through July
  + WOTUS (Waters of the U.S.) – Sen. Daines is supportive of a CRA that would overturn Pres. Biden’s burdensome new WOTUS rule that reverses the Trump era’s navigable waters protection rule. Should go to vote this month.
  + Grizzly bears – US Fish & Wildlife Services recently announced that they will be proceeding with Gov. Gianforte’s NCDE petition to kick off a 12-month review period to delist grizzlies. There probably won’t be a decision made during this administration, but it is progress.
  + Farm Bill: current bill expires at end of FY2023. Let Tory know if there are any priorities we’d like to see included in the new one.
  + National Defense Authorization Act – critical national defense bill for Malmstrom and countering China and our adversaries. Will be addressed in late summer or fall.
  + Appropriations – there may be an effort to fund some departments of the federal government ahead of a continuing resolution and avoid an end-of-the-year omnibus.
  + Ukraine supplemental – vote on additional funds for Ukraine will likely come to a head this summer.
* **Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale) –** Thanks, Emily, for emailing your updates due to sound issues on Zoom.
  + The Congressman was in state this week. Tuesday he honored Photographer Larry Mayer for capturing some of the first images of China’s spy balloon and then he went to Valley Farmers Supply (which Emily only knew about because of these meetings so thank you!). It sounds like Rep. Rosendale will be providing a letter of support for their grant.
  + Wednesday, the Congressman and Emily went to the Jobs Jamboree in Billings which was great…lots of employers! They then went to Hardin and had lunch with the Big Horn County Sugarbeet Growers Association, toured the S Ranch Meats packing plant and retail store, and then went over to Little Big Horn College.
  + This morning they toured Rocky Vista University.
  + In legislation, the Congressman’s Restore Onshore Energy Act passed committee and he also recently introduced HR 1419 to delist Grizzlies. He’s introduced various other bills dealing with veteran and healthcare issues, forest-related issues, and ag issues.

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

**RC&D Financials**

* p. 15 – how the budget is moving forward
* Nan thanked Myrna for help in applying for RMAP (Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program) as we were in the midst of applying when the audit hit. USDA raved about the narrative and we were just told we received the funding.
* We are working with our Beartooth attorney on a letter of opinion, and he needs very specific language regarding the borrowing of money.

**“At the regular meeting of the Beartooth Resource Conservation & Development Area, Inc. (Beartooth RC&D) Board of Directors on March 16, 2023, the Directors unanimously resolve and agree that Beartooth RC&D borrow $400,000 from USDA with matching defederalized funds of $100,000, totaling $500,000 to be loaned out. The Finance Director of Beartooth RC&D is hereby authorized to execute any and all documents necessary to effectuate the loan from USDA.”**

* **ACTION: This statement was read aloud in a request for approval from the Board. Melanie Roe motioned to approve as presented. Holly Higgins seconded. Motion passed.**

**RLF Financials**

* p. 14 – loan clients overview for each county, outstanding balances, etc.
* Just met with RLF Committee re: Roberts Café, which we will be funding.
* Need to open 3 new bank accounts: 1 for SSBCI and 2 for RMAP funding.
* 1 loan hasn’t made payments for a long time. We’re now in 1st position and restructuring the loan.
* 2 potential RMAP loan clients as soon as we receive our funding.
* Bottom of page shows available funds we have in our RLF account.

**ACTION: Melanie motioned to approve the RC&D financials and RLF Financials as presented. Holly seconded. Motion passed.**

**ACTION: Approval to open new accounts for RMAP & SSBCI. Holly motioned to approve the opening of new bank accounts for SSBCI and RMAP funding. Melanie seconded. Motion passed.**

**Development of Signature Stamp Policy (Action)**

* Ryan presented the signature stamp policy to avoid so many trips back and forth to sign. Looking for approval of the Signature Stamp Policy.

**ACTION: Melanie motioned to approve the Signature Stamp Policy as presented. Holly seconded. Motion passed.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Food/Ag – Joel**

* See Joel’s board report for further details (abbreviated report).
* Attending Rotunda Day for Ag in Helena on Tuesday.
* A new Request for Proposals was released for Food & Ag Centers. Will need to reapply.
* Thank you, Danny Choriki, for referring FEI Fertilizer & Fuel in Billings. Joel visited with them and provided them some opportunities. He will be following up on those in the future.
* Visited with Undammed Distilling, StableFeed, and Oswald Farms regarding Value-Added Producer Grants.
* We won’t hear back on the fertilizer grant awards until April.
* Working with Tina on a couple projects in Big Horn County and will be meeting with Tina and those clients (J&D Meats and Flo Ramirez) to present some opportunities for funding.
* Photo of Nan on their visit to Montana Prime Meats (Nan said they have the BEST meatballs!).
* Thanks to Kayla and Lorene for hosting Joel at *The Vault* podcast. Relatively painless!
* Joel has been part of MEDA planning calls with all the folks in the region.

**Economic Development/CRDC – Jacy**

* See Jacy’s board report for more details (abbreviated report)
* Everything is going well with BSTF and both RCDI grants. April will be busy reporting month.
* Awaiting permission to share the EIG Case Study of Poverty in Big Horn County.
* Montana Community Foundation – Disaster Recovery Grant – working on selecting organizations to get the money out to. Making sure we don’t duplicate efforts with other organizations that received MCF funding.
* Other businesses Jacy is working with:
  + Roman Theater
  + Yellowstone Horse & Mule
  + Worden Senior Group

**Regional Roundup**

**Heidi Sparks, City of Laurel** (Unable to attend, but sent these updates ahead of time. Thank you!)

* Construction is set to begin on the S 4th Reconstruction Project March 27th and should be completed this fall.
* CHS is preparing for the turnaround, which should start in April. Pre-work already taking place.
* Laurel is having our 1st Annual Art Walk in downtown this evening 5:00-7:00.

**Kayla Vokral, SBA** (thanks for the email clarification of details, Kayla!)

* SBDC Day was this past Wednesday. Celebrated with social media posts and then ended the night with a Latte Art Competition in our barista space. Also have a few leads on filling the space with an entrepreneur.
* Medical school has accepted over 100 students to start in their first cohort in August.
* Over 25 Space2Place applications were submitted. Winner will be announced at the Better Off in Billings event on April 20th. The theme of that day conference will be “Quality of Place” and all are welcome to register to attend.
* Had Joel on The Vault podcast recently.
* Hosting MEDA in May – some events at The Northern and Rock 31
* Accelerator starting on Monday, March 20th – 2x per week for 10 weeks. It will end on May 23rd during MEDA and there will be a competition.
* Skyline Trail groundbreaking – early summer of 2024 will be completed

**Holly Higgins, FIB of Hardin** (thanks, Holly, for emailing the info due to sound issues!)

* FIB sold the First Interstate Bank drive-up building to *Help Every Pet* at a largely discounted price. They plan to set up a receiving area in the front so people can drop animals off when no one is there. They’re trying to combat the urge for someone to drop their pet off in front of the building, then wreak havoc with the surrounding neighbors and their pets. The local vet would house strays for 5 days at no charge then HEP would be charged per day. By owning the building, they will save money. Most of the animals being turned over or found are cats.
* There was a fundraiser where H.E.P. announced the purchase. The Hardin Bank President presented keys to them during the function.
  + Joel commented that he’d seen Holly’s picture on the front page ☺

**Danny Choriki, City of Billings:**

* Paying attention to what’s happening in legislature.
* Yellowstone County didn’t support Big Sky Passenger Rail efforts, so City of Billings voted to look at how they can support that.

**Jacob Cote, City of Red Lodge:**

* Interstate Engineering colleague, Rebecca Shaw Quinones, is the County Contract Planner for Carbon County. She is accepting letters of support for a FLAP (Federal Lands Access Program) grant to repair East Rosebud Road. Reached out to Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation and Beartooth Backcountry Horsemen, who are both gathering support. Still in the early phases, but it’s exciting to see how many people want to get that road repaired.

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

* City of Hardin, Jacy and Tina started conversation with HUD. Self-assessment was turned in and awaiting next steps.
* Tina was selected to participate (with Jacy/Beartooth’s help) in the NACo Building Resilient Economies in Coal Communities (BRECC) Commitment Coalition. 1 of 20 individuals in the country who are part of this. She will be working with local leaders to build economic resilience and diversity.
* Chamber received $45,000 grant to work on the Depot. City will help administer.
* City awarded Main Street grant for wayfinding signage. County funds will help match.
* Jacy and Tina met with OneHealth and City of Hardin regarding plans moving forward on growth policy and what housing might look like.
* City Council will vote on approval for the nursery Flo wants to put in next to Mike’s Quick Lube.

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

* Very busy with budget process/compensation issues.
* Bill 511 is trying to cap everything you do. Want to take all newly taxable stuff and cap it at 25%. Very mixed feelings about that. Lots of expensive homes going in and will hurt little old ladies.
* Trying to get Forest Service permit for stage 6
* Fully staffed at PMC with medical providers. Still short on nurses.
* Heritage Farms/Greycliff Mill hoping to build some Air BnBs
* ???Issue of access to Crazy Mountains, Yellowstone River
* Thanks to Jacy for working with their Chamber of Commerce – split into 2 positions

**Jason Seyler, DEQ, presented an overview of the Brownfields Program**

* Brownfields is a redevelopment program with an environmental angle
* Brownfields: “Real property, expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant or contaminant” (EPA definition). They are the opposite of greenfields (farms, agricultural properties), which are attractive to development.
* Common steps to traditional redevelopment:
  + Site Discovery
  + Planning
  + Environmental assessment
  + Cleanup
  + Redevelopment
  + NOTE: Brownfields can help with the first 4 steps, so the owner can focus on redevelopment.
* They look for gateways to communities – want it to be attractive and inviting to visitors & residents (Harlowton example).
* Windshield Tours – sometimes takes an outsider’s perspective
  + Old gas stations are prime properties because that’s where there was heavy traffic flow in the past. Petroleum is often easy to cleanup.
  + Old buildings & schools – asbestos, lead paint, etc.
* Planning
  + Can do Phase I and II assessments (did this for the pea cannery in Red Lodge) – preliminary architectural assessment.
  + Gave example of property in Helena that sat empty for 20 years because everyone knew there had been a gas station there at one time and no one wanted to touch it. DEQ did the assessments and it’s now been redeveloped into beautiful new buildings.
  + Another one of old run-down gas station in Butte that is now new DQ restaurant.
  + Laurel Depot – through Brownfields, an affordable housing developer was able to save their grant funds to focus on housing.
  + Great Falls – old Arvon building (oldest livery in downtown Great Falls). Developers wanted to know what they were getting into before acquiring a loan. DEQ investigated and gave a number they could use. Beautiful hotel and restaurant/pub now.
  + Crowley block in Lewiston – asbestos issue. They used Brownfields then partnered with One Health. Now it’s health clinics and pharmacy on lower floors and partnered with Homeword to create affordable housing upstairs. This also encouraged neighboring buildings to look better.
  + Kaste’s Dept Store in Big Sandy – redeveloped into Big Sandy Library.
  + Harlowton – burned out bar that impacts the neighboring buildings. Owner donated it to the city.
  + Old Conoco in Big Timber – before new owner bought it, they wanted to make sure there wasn’t major contamination.
    - Petra Fund – provides cleanup funds for petroleum
    - Now have Crazy Peak Brewing Co and Circle T Taphouse – have infused life back into the community
  + Columbus – Old Chevy dealership – built addition over old gas tanks. Used Brownfields to use a system to suck the vapors out of the ground. Palladium Draughthaus was able to utilize the property.
  + DEQ is working with Helping Hands in Hardin right now. Dollie’s is across the street and on their radar.
  + If you have questions in your communities, reach out to the 3 Brownfields coordinators:
    - Jason Seyler: [jseyler@mt.gov](mailto:jseyler@mt.gov) / 406-444-6447
    - Colleen Owen: [cowen@mt.gov](mailto:cowen@mt.gov) / 406-755-8954
    - Wally Jemmings: [wjemmings@mt.gov](mailto:wjemmings@mt.gov)
    - Anyone can also access them through Jacy at Beartooth.
  + Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has been doing a lot for Brownfields.

**Meeting adjourned at 1:26 pm.**

**Next Beartooth RC&D Board of Directors meeting is May 18th, 2023, in Stillwater County (Columbus Fire Station – 944 E. Pike Ave, Columbus, MT 59019)**