**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**November 16, 2023 – 1:00 pm**

**Sibanye-Stillwater Mine Conference Room**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Jacy Head, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Lorene Hintz, SBDC

Kayla Vokral, SBDC

Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines’ Office

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District

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

Emily Schneller, Rep. Rosendale’s Office

Josiah Porcel, Sen. Tester’s Office

Ryan VanBallegooyen, Billings Job Service

Heidi Sparks, City of Laurel

Holly Higgins, FIB Hardin

**Meeting Called to Order:** Melanie Roe called the meeting to order.

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

**Review September Board Minutes (Action): Don Jones motioned to approve the minutes as presented; Lorene Hintz seconded. Motion passed.**

**Congressional Updates:**

* **Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines)**
  + Continuing resolution just passed – Sen. Daines voted in favor to avoid government shutdown. Will extend current Farm Bill and cut spending 15% across the board with exception of DoD and the V.A.
  + Requesting update on spy balloon investigation from Biden admin ahead of Pres. Xi’s visit. Sent letter to FBI Director Wray – how did China get this into U.S. airspace?
  + Senate Finance Healthcare subcommittee – Sen. Daines discuss the importance of expanding telehealth services, especially for rural areas.
  + Senate banking hearing – Sen. Daines pressed Federal Reserve vice-chairman Michael Barr about a new proposal that would limit credit availability to small businesses. Sen. Daines & Republican colleagues urged the Fed to immediately withdraw the proposal.
  + With Israel/Gaza war, Senator continues calling for increase in border security & warns of terrorism threats here. He has also condemned all instances of antisemitism.
  + Voted against confirmation of Biden’s nominee as Ambassador to Israel, Jack Lew, who has a history of coddling Iran.
  + Senator continues to condemn the Biden admin’s anti-energy policies that are hurting national security and would shut down Colstrip and other power plants.
* **Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale)**
  + New Speaker of House – Mike Johnson. 2-part continuing resolution (CR) passed by House and Senate – includes funding for 4 bills that will be extended until Jan. 19th. Funding for remaining 8 bills is extended until Feb. 2. Emily can provide details if anyone wants.
  + Farm Bill lumped in with C.R. to extend current provisions for a year. Congressman was opposed to this for 2 reasons: believes we should be voting on single-issue legislation and because it doesn’t give us a chance to update the bill or advocate for Montana’s specific priorities for the Farm Bill specifically. He did vote against the CR along with 92 Republicans and 2 Democrats.
  + House has passed 7 individual appropriation bills.
  + Israel – Congressman supported bill in House to support funding for Israel rather than use the funding for Biden’s 87,000 IRS agents.
* **Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**
  + Sen. Tester wrote a letter to Pres. Biden urging him to address concerns with Pres. Xi Jinping at upcoming meeting – urged clarity in rejecting Chinese aggression, spy balloon, fentanyl crisis, and unfair trade practices negatively affecting Montana producers.
  + Confronted head of DHS Sen. Mayorkas and expressed concern over failure to secure southern border – urged admin to prioritize and supply resources to combat deadly flow of fentanyl. Seeing spillover effect of border issues in Billings.
  + Senator introduced legislation to address affordable housing in MT – Preservation and Reinvestment Initiative for Community Enhancement Act – aims to revitalize State’s affordable housing supply by establishing a permanent manufactured housing community improvement grant program (PRICE grant program). Rising taxes and cost of living makes this an important topic.
  + Town Hall in Butte – only member of MT delegation who does in-person town halls to let folks freely express their opinions on D.C. happenings.
  + Senator is expressing support for Israel, condemned terrorist attacks, wants to make sure the $6 billion in Iranian assets from the Iranian deal are frozen.

**Treasurer/Financial Reports: Nan Knight**

**RLF and RC&D Financials (ACTION)**

* P. 8 of materials
* RLF current standing – currently 21 loans in 5-county regions. 1 loan will be paid out at end of month.
* 1 new loan closed last month in Hardin.
* Able to drawdown some of our RMAP TA assistance this month.
* Finished audit process with JCCS.
* Note where the bank balance is sitting right now of all our revolving loans.
* Working on a project in Red Lodge right now for 2nd position on a Main Street building.
* Pg. 9 is Beartooth books and where they are sitting.
* **ACTION: Kayla Vokral motioned to approve the financials as presented. Don Jones seconded. Motion carried.**
* Nan said she worked with JCCS, our new auditor this year, and everything went very smoothly. She highly recommends them.

**Audit (ACTION)**

* Nan provided a few copies of the most recent audit for anyone who wants to examine them.
* She presented the completed audit draft to the board. Wrote off a couple loans that were outstanding for many years. Nan wants clean books moving forward, & the audit firm is helping.
* Don asked if we set up a new policy for writing off old, bad loans. Yes, it is 3 years now, and there is a process for writing them off to better absorb the loss.
* For example, in QuickBooks, if we have $100,000 loan, you put that in and a $5,000 placeholder for interest. The $5k is just a placeholder, not owed by the business, but it’s still in QuickBooks and still shows a balance. It’s hard to get rid of without showing a loss.
  + Melanie asked if it will show as a future asset?
  + Nan said the auditors created a different account that won’t affect the books but it still tracks the charges. The placeholder idea doesn’t work well, so this is a big improvement.
* Once we get through 2023 audits, then everything will be new and fresh and on track.
* This has been messed up for at least a decade from before Jillann’s time.
* We have an amortization schedule that tracks our loans, but it’s not loan-tracking software. Auditor recommended getting the correct loan-tracking software, so we will get what they recommend.
  + Cost will be in the $1,000-$1500 range – one-time cost
* Nan will still use QuickBooks for accounting, but the loan-tracking will also go in this new software. It will probably replace the T-value that she currently does.
  + Don said that Yellowstone is going with JCCS next year, too.
* **ACTION: Don Jones motioned to approve the 2022 audit as presented. Lorene Hintz seconded. Motion carried.**

**MOUs: Joel Bertolino**

* Have conducted half of our annual MOUs and it’s been a pleasure to chat with the commissioners and city councils to see what their upcoming priorities and goals are and share what activities we’ve been doing.

**Staff Reports**

**Food & Ag: Joel Bertolino**

* Recent training in Butte for FADCs and discussed Local Food in Schools program. Some OPI folks were there to discuss different options. Have been brainstorming some of the handout materials to get to schools to give them ideas on how they can use local food.
* Pre-app for GTA funding was in October. Assisted 4 clients; 2 have received funding and haven’t heard from other 2 yet.
* 3 meat-processing applications went in. They had a lot of applications (25) this round.
* VAPG
  + Oswald Farms received funding
  + S-Ranch did not
  + Speedy and Flo’s Sweet Corn – assisted with pre-app phase and hope to assist them with SBDC’s help on the next phase.
* J&D Meats – Nan and Joel will be visiting with them soon on RMAP
* Yellowstone Pasta – got a green light on pre-app and will be submitting a full application.
* Undammed Distilling – assisted a little but haven’t heard if they were approved yet.
* Becky’s Berries – worked with Lane Gobbs from MMEC and Joel and Nan visited recently to discuss marketing for new product line of mustards. New equipment.
* Fishtail General Store – Joel, Nan and Lane visited their location across from the general store.
  + Nan said it’s very amazing. They do all the breakfast burritos and sandwiches for every City Brew store. Their warehouse cranks out a LOT of food.
  + Lane will be helping her moving forward too.
  + Katie Martin, the owner, is very energetic and would be happy to give a tour.
  + Beartooth started working with her 12 years ago and helped her with a grant for signage and have continued to stay in touch.
  + Kayla said Katie might be a great podcast guest. Nan or Joel will send contact to Kayla Vokral and Don Jones.
* Yellowstone Valley Farms – also interested in a REAP grant

**Economic Development: Jacy Head**

* BSTF grant program will no longer exist. They are transitioning to the Montana Growth Fund (MGF). BSTF was a grant, but MGF will be loans.
  + We still have 1 BSTF Planning Grant that is due Dec. 30th.
* 2 RCDI grants still moving forward
  + BHC – Economic development and housing
  + Red Lodge – solely focused on housing
* CRDC Re-certification process just finished – THANK YOU for all the letters of support. It was an RFP process, and we had to submit our proposal as $50,000. We’ve historically received almost $72,000, so hopefully the State will adjust the amounts. Currently have 11 CRDCs; if another region applies, the pie will be divided even more.
* Helping Hands Food Bank – waiting on different parties to comment on the draft report produced by TetraTech. Project has gone on longer than anticipated, but we’re hoping to make Petra Fund available for cleanup.
* Rocky Fork Inn site in Red Lodge – major property that was impacted by 2022 flooding. Waiting on FEMA buy-out; once this is resolved, we will do a Phase 1 assessment, then do demolition and disposal. A contractor reached out to Jacy who could probably use some of the demolished materials. The demo will be free-of-charge.
  + Tori asked if we’ve been working with The Yodeler at all? Jacy explained that we were approached about the Paul Bruhn grant application, and we volunteered to sit on their committee. That funding would likely help that business.
* Brownfields Assessment Grant – needed to update some policies before final submission to EPA for pre-award compliance. Once released, we can put out our RFP for Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP).
  + Need to have a Brownfields Steering Committee to prioritize sites. If anyone is interested, please reach out to Jacy! Just have one interested member so far, and he is from the Crow Tribe.
* MT Community Foundation disaster recovery funds: All funds disbursed; waiting on final reports/photos back from grantees to submit our report to MCF.
* DOC-Business Attraction: Jacy is attending monthly check-in meetings. Nan has been very helpful in meeting with clients. We’ve decided it would be helpful to have an informal County representative that we could reach out to if certain projects come along.
* Additional clients we have worked with:
  + One Health – master neighborhood plan in Hardin
  + Sandstone School – reached out for grant writer referrals
  + Little Bighorn Camp – possible Brownfields project
  + Town of Lodge Grass – another Brownfields project; priority site from our application.
  + Sports Hut – Columbus potential Brownfields site; maintaining communications
  + Carl Hamming – other people are becoming interested in RCDI grants, so he reached out to Jacy.

**REGIONAL ROUNDUP: Commissioner Melanie Roe**

**Kayla Vokral, SBDC:**

* Small Business Saturday on Nov. 25th
  + Have success stories to submit to SBA to show what we are doing. This year we wanted to make a bigger deal. Had a party with our 2 success stories: Molly and Friends Doggy Daycare in Laurel and Meadowlark Brewery. 8 other businesses are participating in Small Business Saturday, offering discounts if you use the code *Vault* at checkout. This social media campaign involves some great giveaways!
* 3rd year participating with Youth Entrepreneurship Market - 1st weekend in December during Art Walk – 70 high school entrepreneurs selling their goods. Fun time downtown from 5-8 pm.
* Allegiant Airlines – our business recruitment senior director spoke with them about nonstop flights to LA, and they are going to do that. In May those will start again.
* MEDA fall conference: Steve Arveschoug got the Anthony J. Priete Champion of Economic Development Award, and *The Vault* and our MT APEX Accelerator received Economic Impact awards.
* Lorene/Kayla: Recently found out that starting Jan. 1 new businesses will be federally mandated to sign up in an online system - CyberSecurity issue. If they don’t register, they risk a $5,000 fine. We’re still learning more information about that. There will be a grace period for existing businesses to sign up. Once Lorene and Kayla learn more, they will send out more details for Beartooth to share with clients and board members.
  + Rock31 website has Steps to Establish Your Business – will put it in that. Under FAQ. Kayla & Lorene will share the info with us when they know more.
* **Lorene Hintz, BSED/SBDC:**
  + Spoke with Dianne in Community Development and she did a Brownfields presentation in Laurel – Jacy spoke too. She said it went real well.
  + Continue to refer people to the Beartooth Regional Housing Study; it is still being utilized by many people.
* **Ryan Van Ballegooyen, Billings Job Service:**
  + State Workforce Innovation Board (SWIB) Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) outreach as it relates to workforce – dates are getting put together. Ryan included Beartooth and BSED on the invites. They are putting together a state plan and want to hear from businesses, stakeholders and elected officials about what we’re seeing in workforce development. Want to continue receiving training dollars – incorporates DLI, OPI, DPHS programs and others. Please attend if possible – it’s important.
* **Holly Higgins, First Interstate Bank of Hardin:**
  + New storage units going in behind convenience store (behind McDonalds) – fenced off, gravel in, buildings going up, and almost complete.
  + 2 vet clinics in Hardin – Vet Barn and Animal Care Center. Vet Barn is for sale and they do a lot of the large animal care; one vet is leaving. Closing on 12/31 whether or not it is sold. One vet who worked for Vet Barn is starting a mobile unit, which will help, but this is a problem for ag producers moving forward.
  + First Interstate Bank building downtown hasn’t sold. Bank *may* decide to donate the building, and it would have to go to a nonprofit. Any recommendations for a nonprofit if they decide to donate? Let Holly know of any ideas.
  + Love’s truck stop is putting in an RV park, and that is coming along well. Will just have electrical hook-ups. Might hurt local KOA business.
  + Golf course under new ownership isn’t looking real good. Between cost and poor conditions, some members will not be renewing.
  + KOA decided to stay open year-round. They are housing some of the traveling nurses.
* **Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District:**
  + Dan’s story about a bike smuggler reminded us that sometimes in our effort to pinpoint things we are doing, we look so closely we don’t get a full picture of the rest of what we are trying to accomplish.
  + Working on stream purity between Big Horn and Yellowstone Conservation district jurisdictions. Trying to get community involvement to be aware of issues and work together.
  + Aquatic station checkpoints – very successful year. Have had 2 stations going. District received an “Atta boy” for their ability to largely stop the drive-bys and bring down from 40% to 5%.
* Ryan said we have elections coming up in January. May need someone else to join the Executive Committee, so please consider that.
* **Kayla Vokral motioned to adjourn the meeting; Lorene Hintz seconded. Motion carried.**

**Meeting adjourned at 2:27 pm.** Happy Thanksgiving, everyone!

**Next Beartooth RC&D Board of Directors Meeting: January 18, 2023 - Yellowstone County**