**Beartooth RC&D**

**Board Meeting Minutes**

**September 21, 2023 – 1:00 pm**

**Roberts Fire Hall**

**Members Present:**

Joel Bertolino, BRCD

Nan Knight, BRCD

Myrna Lastusky, BRCD

Dan Lowe, Big Horn Conservation District

Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County

Ryan VanBallegooyen, Billings Job Service

Commissioner Melanie Roe, Sweet Grass County

Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County

Lorene Hintz, BSED

Danny Choriki, Billings City Council

Tory Kolkhorst, Sen. Daines’ Office

Joey Grewell, on behalf of Emily Schneller, Rep. Rosendale’s Office

Kerri Crowe, Workforce Services Devlopment

Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County

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

Josiah Porcel

Brent Moore

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

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

**Review March Board Minutes (Action): Melanie Roe motioned to approve. Scott Miller seconded. Motion carried.**

**Congressional Updates:**

* **Tory Kolkhorst (Sen. Daines)**
	+ Continue to see service issues with USPS throughout state. Lost packages are a huge issue. Sen. Daines wrote a letter to Postmaster DeJoy about this.
	+ Possible government shutdown – Every year the Senator joins on the “no budget, no pay” act to prevent members of Congress from getting paid if they can’t pass a budget.
	+ Biden admin came after MT way of life by delaying/halting funding to schools to teach gun safety/hunter safety – Senator is pushing back.
	+ Safer Banking Act – will be considered for Senate Banking Committee next week to protect MT businesses from liberal initiatives in the ESG movement.
	+ Introduced bipartisan bill to help promote cloud computing. Sen. was in private sector for 30 years with Gov. Gianforte.
	+ Introduced a bill to unlock public access and improve forest management on over 100,000 acres of public land.
* **Josiah Porcel (Sen. Tester)**
	+ Sen. Tester’s bipartisan defending hunters’ education act – would require Dept. of Ed. to restore school dollars for school archery, gun safety, and hunter education programs. Biden admin blocked funding for gun safety programs. Growing up in MT, hunters’ safety is a critical issue – we’re all proud of our heritage. Pushing back on that.
	+ Top of mind is avoiding a government shutdown. Lot of action right now on House side. Over 1 million federal employees and troops overseas wouldn’t get paid.
	+ Sen. Tester and Sen. Daines both sent letters to Postmaster General Louis DeJoy on delays with post office, which is hitting Bozeman and rural areas hard. Trying to see improvement with staffing and other issues.
* **Joey Grewell – here on behalf of Emily Schneller (Rep. Rosendale)**
	+ Great to be here!
	+ Emily is sad to be absent – she is out on medical leave.
	+ Rep. Rosendale did 28 stops in a couple weeks – very busy.
		- Did Energy Tour with Rep. Andy Biggs & Eli Crane of Arizona. They went to Sibanye-Stillwater Mine, Yellowtail Dam, Colstrip, the CHS refinery, ate at Greycliff Mill, attended Billings Air Show, and many businesses.
	+ Continuing resolution to fund government. The DOD rule bill – voted on again today and didn’t pass again. Planned to do CR right after and now will need to renegotiate. Rep. Rosendale is a strong no on both bills due to spending concerns.
	+ Farm Bill – expires on Sept. 30th. Looks like new one won’t be passed, so there will likely be some sort of continuing funding mechanism. Rosendale will support it.
		- Joel: What kind of timing? Joey said it could be a ways down the road – probably 6-8 months.

**Treasurer/Financial Reports: Nan Knight (RC&D Financials / RLF Financials / RMAP) (Action)**

* RLF funds: right now we have 21 loans, over 1.7 million loaned out.
* $352,000 available
* Seeking more funding
* We have $300,000 we can drawdown for microloan funds but need to deplete the $150,000 first.
* 2 SSBCI loans are out there; one has started paying back and the other has first payment next month.
* The RLF side of Beartooth has been extremely busy even with the higher interest rates.
* Newest loan is for a garbage can cleaning business. Nan described the truck that cleans and sanitizes garbage cans.
	+ Ryan commented on how much money is out there for RLF – and yet we are looking for more to help more businesses.
		- Nan will be closing her 9th loan since starting at Beartooth.
	+ Melanie – who is the new loan? A garbage can cleaning business.

Beartooth books: p. 15

* Where our books stand right now. Joel has been very active with Food and Ag.

**ACTION: Scott Miller moved to approve financials as presented. Melanie Roe seconded. Motion carried.**

**RMAP:** We were awarded $12,500 for TA to do trainings and provide TA to small businesses. There will be more coming in the next year. Nice feature of RMAP in addition to the $400,000 loan.

**IRP (Intermediary Relending Program) Resolution:**

* Revolving loan funds are getting depleted.
* Last year the Board approved RMAP funding to loan out microloans of $50,000. But we need more money to fund larger loans.
* This will allow us to re-loan out money at a 1% interest to us. We are requesting $750,000 and need board approval.
* The previous IRP was for $1 million ($750K of USDA and $250K from MT Board of Investments). Since we are reapplying, we don’t need to provide match money this time.
* Dan Lowe said it sounds like we are in a good place for it.
	+ Nan said yes, we really don’t have much money left to loan out – technically less than $100K at the moment.
	+ If we submit our application on Sept. 30th, we will have money to loan out in January.
* Nan: currently can only loan up to $250K and this will allow us to loan $400K.
* Nan asks businesses what works best for them since each fund is a little different. RMAP equipment loan (typically can only go out 7 years but we can go 10 years).
* How do we establish interest rate? If we come in 2nd position with a bank, we match the bank’s interest rate. We are paying 1%, so that helps us. We don’t compete with banks, so we must have a denial letter from a bank to fund. Closing costs are 1-2%.
* Fixed 20-year rates vs. renegotiating in five years is a benefit, too.

**Melanie Roe moved to adopt the resolution allowing Beartooth to apply for a $750,000 IRP loan. Scott Miller seconded. Motion passed.**

**EPA Policy Updates:**

* Jacy is out. Joel explained that we need to update policies very specifically to comply with EPA’s recommendations.
* Nan: We do need to update our policies and procedures. We are meeting next week as a staff to do that and then turn it in to the executive committee.
* Joel: We get program audits from state and federal agencies all the time. There is a lot of lawyer-speak that we normally sign to. But EPA wants us to implement those into our actual policies and procedures. Jacy has spoken with others who have been through this process.
	+ Mel: How will they check that we are in compliance? There’s a lot of disadvantaged language, etc – very heavy lifting for rural communities.
	+ Nan: A lot of the policies are financial. There will be cross-checks in different areas.

Tory: With all the different businesses in here, I’d like to set up tours with some of them. When Beartooth applies for federal grant funding, reach out to Sen. Daines’ office and ask for a letter of support.

**ACTION: Danny Choriki motioned for the policy updates to be approved by Executive Committee. Melanie Roe seconded. Motion carried.**

**Staff Reports – Program/Project Updates**

**Joel Bertolino, Food & Ag Director**

* In Helena on Sept. 6th – twice a year face-to-face meeting on Food & Ag and Specialty Crop Block Grant to discuss what’s working, what’s not, what’s new. They have some federal funds they want FADCs to get on the ground. Dealing with the middle of the food supply chain and wanting to expand infrastructure for that in MT. Not sure what the application process is going to look like, but we’ll make that available to our clients.
	+ Danny: What is food supply chain? Adding value – cleaning or milling of grain/lentils, further processing.
	+ Tory asked if we ever get solicited by cannabis or hemp producers. Joel said he’s been approached by hemp ones.
	+ We stay away from cannabis because part of our funding is federal. Joel has helped a couple of hemp clients since hemp is legal federally.

S-Ranch Meats: applied for $250K VAPG grant. So far not approved.

Oswald Farms: 2nd year they applied for $250K VAPG grant, and this year they were awarded. Provide beef for Edgar Bar and many other clients online. Built small business front at their operation on Hwy 310 and are starting to sell local produce as well.

Speedy and Flo’s Sweet Corn: sell their corn all over the region and counties around us. Based in Hardin. Tina Toyne asked us to help with a small marketing grant and they received those funds. They plan to apply for a 2nd grant coming up. Speedy and Flo own a lot in Hardin and hope to build a greenhouse and business front.

J&D Meats: interested in RMAP funding. Joel and Nan will go to visit them next month to discuss further. Meat plant who also has a lunch counter.

Yellowstone Pasta: hope to work with them on a GTA grant, which opens Oct. 2nd. Will be contacting all GTA clients next week to alert them to this opportunity. Will probably start with wholesale and may do retail, also. Looking for bigger equipment and grow. He doesn’t have a current storefront.

* Danny spoke with owner of Yellowstone Pasta at recent farmers’ market – it’s his 2nd job, so that makes it tough. He may want a bigger pasta mill, & they discussed locally sourcing some of his materials and trying to keep it organic. Some other people are making their own pasta now, too.

Undammed Distilling – potential GTA grant for expansion.

Greycliff Mill: Nan has had more contact with them than Joel. They are always looking for potential funding sources.

**Ongoing Projects:**

Montana Prime Meats: Lamont Hermann: Possible RMAP microloan coming.

Yellowstone Valley Farms: talking with Reuben Stahl about REAP grant/loan to cut down on monthly energy bills; also looking at GTA and other grants to help get additional greenhouse space.

Primitive Meats: Still hoping to start on development of small meat plant; not started yet.

Becky’s Berries: developing process for packaging for new line of mustards. Working with MMEC to connect her with resources.

**FADC Outreach:**

Helping Hands Food Bank & Community Garden: Hardin, MT – State Dept of Ag visited and Joel joined them. Trying to use a lot of local foods in their food bank.

Special K Ranch: visited with school district recently; tremendous operation in terms of greenhouses, cattle, sheep.

* Scott Miller mentioned that Carbon County Meats has contacted two commissioners. Joel said that they went back and forth on Beartooth loans, and they found a private lender to fund them.
* Thanks to Myrna for putting in for the funding to get these Owls. Hopefully will improve our meetings.

Dept. of Ag applied for a grant to offer TA for the REAP applications.

* Nan: Joel will be 1 of 3 for the State (train the trainer)

We got some funding through one of the other FADCs collaboratively to do more on Farm to School initiative. May have Myrna assist with those efforts.

**Jacy Head, Economic Development:** Traveling back from her panel presentation at the IEDC Conference in Dallas, TX. See her submitted report in the board materials.

**Myrna Lastusky, Operations Support**

* Attended Leadership 32 yesterday in Stillwater County. Great event (1st of 5 monthly workshops) with 10 women from Stillwater County. Discussed leadership, values, emotional intelligence, and visited Tippet Rise.
* Bozeman Trail mapping work – field work at end of August – checking mileage markers for driving tour, taking photos, working through edits on the narrative and driving tour. Have begun discussions on next step of having a phone app.
* Marketing promo materials – have a couple items coming before our Expert Week booth at BSED on Sept. 29th.
* WAS involved in many meetings with our two RCDI grants, but am pulling back from those due to time constraints.
* IRP application – working with Nan to get this submitted next week in hopes of receiving $750,000 more in loan funds to help area businesses.

**Regional Roundup:**

**Lorene Hintz, Small Business Administration**

* New housing projects in downtown Billings; one multi-family project in Laurel; Jackson Court LMI housing is almost complete.
* Billings bypass, inter-belt loop, and Skyline Trail work are all in progress.
* Anticipated conversations with Sun Country, Delta, and American airlines for expanded coverage to Billings.
* Rio Sabina’s is closing. Not sure why.
* LURA plans to upgrade within the TIF District.
* A group visited the new First Federal Bank and Trust.
* New City Brew going up on 17th and Grand. Going up all over.
* BSED is having annual meeting on Oct. 11th.
* Check out *The Vault* – Kayla and Marcell are interviewing some great people on this podcast.
* Healthcare Summit for students on Oct. 27th
* Manufacturing Day to get students interested in these jobs.
* Expert Week is next week – one day for attorneys, one for accountants, and one for marketing. Can book a slot to ask questions of these experts. Then Friday is a trade show with booths with 16 different resource partners, including Beartooth RC&D. 70 slots for experts, and 75% are filled so far. We got great feedback last year from the attendees. Last year the experts really enjoyed it and the attendees loved it.

**Commissioner Don Jones, Yellowstone County:**

* Lorene covered most of it.
* Interim Marijuana zoning laws have been working on; there are some in places they aren’t supposed to be.
	+ City of Billings banned them, but there are pockets of County property within City that haven’t been annexed in.
	+ Lot of misinformation out there . . .
	+ Danny said revenue from marijuana tax went down last year.
* *Yellowstone County News* says Metra made $3.7 million. Not sure about the math since we actually lost $2.6 million.
* HB-819 bill for vertical, high-density housing – 2 bills in one
	+ 1st part is COR
	+ Go to Section 9 and there is funding for water/sewer/etc for high-density housing. Dan Villa or Don can answer questions. MBOI will administer it.

**Stephanie Ray, Stillwater County:**

* EDA road project on Fiddler Creek & West Rosebud is just about complete – slip roads are about done.
* Leadership 32 class. Steph participated in Leadership 49 in Park County and would love to get it going in other counties including Carbon County.
* City of Columbus: huge sewer main project happening and will be done second week of Oct.
* Beaver Creek Wind Farm with 88 turbines will be breaking ground in late fall/early spring.
* BSTF project will be wrapping up soon on the Industrial/Business Park and excited to compete for some new business opportunities in Stillwater.
* Very active leadership group in Stillwater – lots going on!
* Old fairgrounds will become the new law and justice center. It is shovel-ready and just need some funding.

**Danny Choriki, City of Billings:**

* New airport director is amazing. Doing a lot of outreach. (side note: Kerri went to college with him in Fairbanks, AK – crazy!). Cape Air got the contract.
* Family Justice Center is coming together great. Core idea is to have one location where family violence survivors could get all the services available. This has been a trend for about 20 years around U.S., and we’ll be the first in Montana. Huge opportunity for all providers to use the same data systems and be more connected. Will help to see where the gaps are and set better goals. YWCA has room for us to start it there and City set aside $200K to get it started. There should be serious traction on it this winter. [www.AllianceForHope.org](http://www.AllianceForHope.org) is where you can get more info.
* Rumors of dark fiber around MT. Dark fiber is fiber laid underground but not connected. History of companies who came in, laid fiber, then folded or sold. Trying to figure out how to map it. If it’s in our right-of-way or abandoned, the City owns it. If you know anyone or know of the names of people involved, let Danny know. Important for Billings to find that fiber and start using it, especially in Downtown. Banks and other businesses can’t get enough bandwidth.
	+ Steph said the new Civic Center has to use Starlink because they have no internet – it’s a big issue in MT. Starlink is working great for them.
	+ Danny: there is money floating around, but it’s a complicated issue.
* Today’s technology can put a network out across the downtown area. You can connect to your internet from other locations.

**Dan Lowe, Big Horn County Conservation**

* On four boards including City/County Planning Board and Weed District.
* Managing aquatic check stations. Enlightening and challenging.
* Our budget is about $30,000/month. Challenging to find workers who are willing to show up to work for the paycheck.
* 310 permits – not too many this year.
* Love coming to our board meetings and seeing all the energy.

**Commissioner Scott Miller, Carbon County:**

* 3 bridges being completed from flood and will be done in December.
* West Rosebud Road ($20 million) should get done plus a boat dock. The lake will get used by everyone, not just the people who live up there.
* Some county bridges are 100 years old and want to convert them to culverts. Working with engineers. Will be cheaper and will last longer.
* Bridge getting put in at Chance across the Clarks Fork.
* Amtrak is coming through in next 3-5 years. Big Sky Passenger Rail is likely going to happen through Bridger and down through Wyoming. Line will extend to Denver and south.
* Spent $1 million to buy Cedar Wood Villa Nursing Home. Carbon County has lived in 6 different buildings for all offices. Will put all current offices in Red Lodge into one location. Residents can park nearby and visit all offices and not walk all over town. 2- to 4-year project.
* Health Dept. is doing great with schools and providing service to seniors and the county. Need to hire nurses and are having issues getting that done.
* Also looking for sheriff’s deputies. Good wage and healthcare, but not a lot of available housing.
* Passed our county budget and stayed at average growth over the last 5 years (3%) – only went up a bit due to flood. Trying to get FEMA to repay still.
* Engineers and commissioners are fighting with Forest Service and others to get stuff done.
* Increased budget for employee growth and road equipment. Need to make improvements.
* Harvest time – farmers seem to be happy; trying to keep roads open to them.
* Mill levy that Red Lodge Ambulance went for failed miserably, so their services will be impacted. Won’t be able to support nearly as far or as fast.
* Fromberg – City Council vote coming with no people on the ballot. Nobody signed up; just have 2 write-ins.
* Fromberg – American Legion building has to be torn down and start over. Need some grants or loans to help them. Send any ideas to Scott.
* County sold Joliet property for $425,000. Signed paperwork today. Made money off of it.

Meeting adjourned at 2:33 pm.

**Next Beartooth RC&D Board Meeting: November 16th in Stillwater County.**