



Comprehensive Economic **2022** Development Strategy
Bear Paw Development Corporation
of Northern Montana

Acknowledgements

The development of this Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was made possible through the collaboration of many individuals, including those who serve on Bear Paw Development's Board of Directors and Strategy Committee. These committed individuals bring a diverse perspective to our expansive and meaningful look into what makes our regional economy tick. For that we are very grateful. We also extend our gratitude to those residents of our Economic Development District who responded to surveys and participated in our CEDS development process. The active involvement of local and tribal elected officials, area business owners, school officials and private citizens helped to create this strategic planning document that will properly serve this special part of northern Montana for years to come.

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Cover Photo Credits

Clockwise from the top: Bear Paw Mountains from Bear Paw Lake in Hill County by BPDC. Wheat harvest in Phillips County by Morgan Ellis/C&M Photography. Mother and baby cow in Liberty County by Amanda Moss. Rocky Boy 2019 Annual Celebration on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation by Sunny Whalawitsa.

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Introduction

Since 1968, Bear Paw Development Corporation has brought individuals representing education, business, government, finance, agriculture, local government, and health care together to discuss, analyze, and plan for economic prosperity within a 5-county area in northern Montana. Every 5 years, the discussions and analysis culminate into a focused, comprehensive economic development plan designed to improve the economy and quality of life in Blaine, Chouteau, Hill, Liberty, and Phillips Counties and the Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations. The vast 5-county District encompasses immense diversity within its small, close-knit, agriculturally-based communities. Home to just over 35,400 people, the nearly 18,000 square mile District encompasses world renowned golden plains, the iconic Missouri River Breaks, and the beautiful Bear Paw Mountains. The District is also home to three institutions of higher education and a workforce historically based in agriculture, mining, rail transportation, and energy production.

Throughout the District, residents share economic goals of providing the infrastructure, housing, small business community, and labor force needed to support a more diversified economy. They want to attract new, good-paying jobs to the region and provide commercial services that will entice young families to stay and flourish. The communities within the Bear Paw District face many challenges, such as dated infrastructure and an aging

workforce, but there are many reasons to be optimistic and we describe them in this document. The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is Bear Paw's blueprint for addressing challenges, leveraging opportunities, and focusing on a return on investment for our communities. The CEDS presents the renewed commitment by our staff and Board of Directors to deliver and sustain a high level of attention and service to each of our members and the residents of northern Montana. The document also ensures Bear Paw's continued compliance with the CEDS guidelines as laid out by the Economic Development Administration (EDA).

The 2022 update of Bear Paw Development Corporation's CEDS was conducted during a very interesting time in the nation's history as the COVID-19 pandemic continually posed large-scale impacts to communities and the economy. Effects of health concerns, business shutdowns, and social distancing were felt both nationally and locally. While members of the Bear Paw District continue to process the events of the pandemic, Bear Paw and partners have made a concerted effort to develop priorities and potential solutions for creating a stronger and more resilient economy in the face of a new, virtual-based world. Presented in this plan are the results of a District-wide SWOT analysis survey and the thoughtful strategizing of Bear Paw's staff, Board of Directors, and Strategy

Committee. Bear Paw and its members, now more than ever, recognize the need for comprehensive planning and aim to build on the 2022 CEDS in the upcoming years to further develop resiliency planning and new strategies for growing our rural economies.

Bear Paw Development

Established in 1969, Bear Paw Development Corporation is Montana's longest-serving Economic Development District. Over the years, Bear Paw has coordinated hundreds of millions of dollars for important community and economic development projects in northern Montana. From helping local governments build infrastructure, to financing small business start-ups and expansions, to cleaning up contaminated properties, to assisting entrepreneurs with their business plans and working to add value to our agricultural products, Bear Paw continues to make a positive and noticeable difference for northern Montana. Our high level of activity is made possible by allocating the resources and talents of our organization and staff to those projects that are consistent with the goals and priorities outlined in this document.



BEAR PAW BY THE NUMBERS



\$181,468,227

Funding coordinated since 2006 for projects in Bear Paw's District through state, federal, and local government sources, as well as through banks, revolving loan funds, owner equity and other investments

Business lending by Bear Paw Development, plus leveraged funds coordinated by our organization, for more than 351 private sector start-ups and expansions over 38 years

\$68 Million



1,795

Estimated number of jobs created or retained due to business lending activity over the past 34 years

Funding coordinated in 2021 through grant writing, revolving loan fund investments, bank financing and other sources for business start-ups and expansions and community enhancements, including local government infrastructure

\$13,143,829



121

Number of business owners or potential entrepreneurs counseled by our Small Business Development Center

Leveraged funds from outside sources in 2021 for every \$1 of local government investment in Bear Paw Development

\$125.17



Regional Background



Photo by Christina Lickfold



Region Overview

There are two reservations, five counties, and forty-two communities that comprise the Bear Paw District. The communities are (*Incorporated Community):

- BLAINE** Chinook*, Cleveland, Ft. Belknap, Harlem*, Hays, Hogeland, Lloyd, Lodgepole, Lohman, Turner, and Zurich
- CHOUTEAU** Big Sandy*, Carter, Floweree, Fort Benton*, Highwood, Geraldine*, Loma, Montague, Shonkin, Square Butte, and Virgelle
- HILL** Box Elder, Fresno, Gildford, Havre*, Hingham*, Inverness, Kremlin, Rudyard, and Simpson
- LIBERTY** Chester*, Joplin, Lothair, and Whitlash
- PHILLIPS** Malta*, Dodson*, Saco*, Whitewater, Zortman, Landusky and Loring



The District is home to many geographic features, including the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument, the Bear Paw Mountains, Sweetgrass Hills, Little Rocky Mountains, and the Highwood Mountains. Water resources in the region include the Fresno, Tiber, and Nelson Reservoirs, along with the Marias, Missouri, and Milk Rivers. Many of these water sources are fed by the St. Mary Diversion Dam located on the St. Mary River downstream from the Lower St. Mary Lake in Glacier National Park.

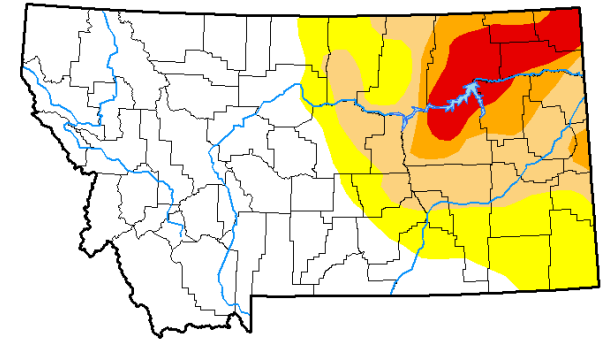
Water resources are limited and are highly influenced by the region's climate, which is subject to extreme weather conditions. The region experiences severely cold winters, with below 0° temperatures, and also receives moderate snowfall each year. The region is also susceptible to hot, dry conditions in the peak summer months.

Data from the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information show that Montana has experienced a 2°F increase in average annual temperature since the early 20th century.¹ 2022 drought data shows abnormally dry conditions for nearly the entire region and moderate drought conditions in areas of southeastern Hill and southern Blaine Counties.²

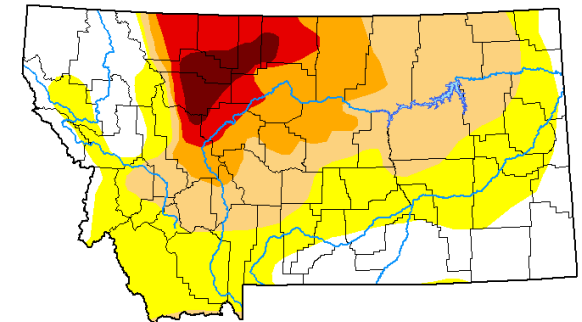
Alongside this unique climate is a region with many natural resources and renewable energy resources. As researched by the US. Department of Energy National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the northern

Montana 5-Year Drought Comparison

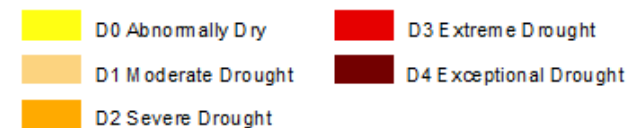
June 20, 2017

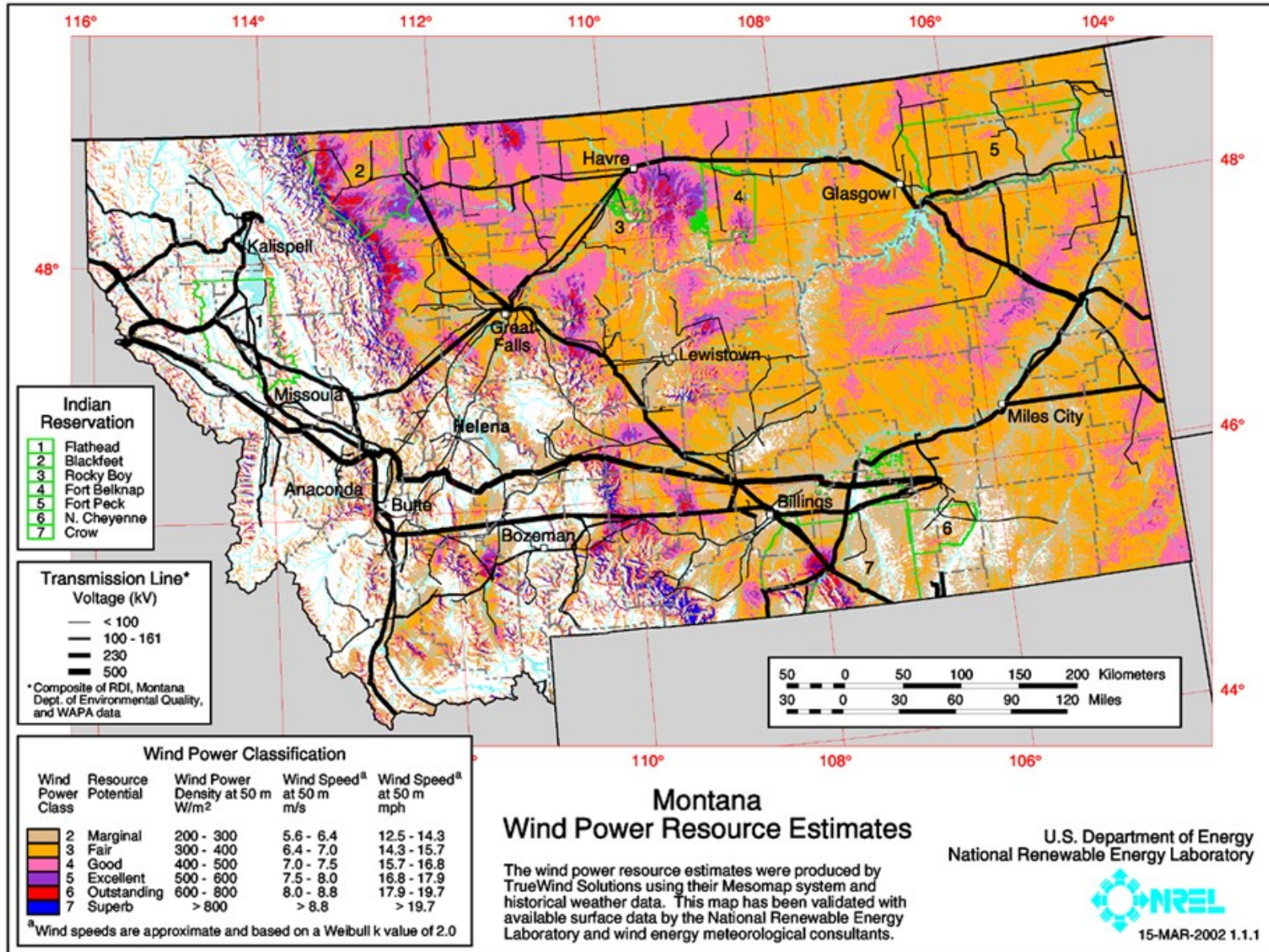


June 21, 2022



Intensity:



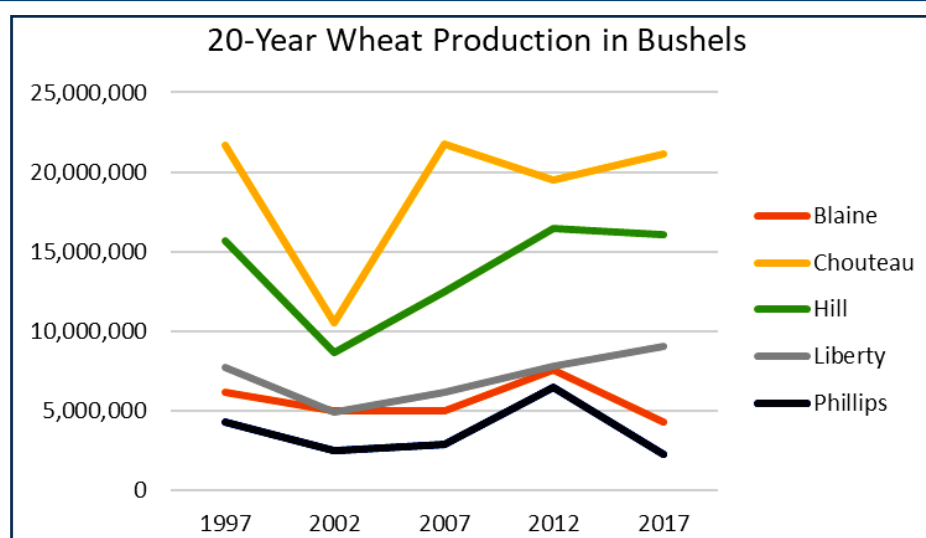
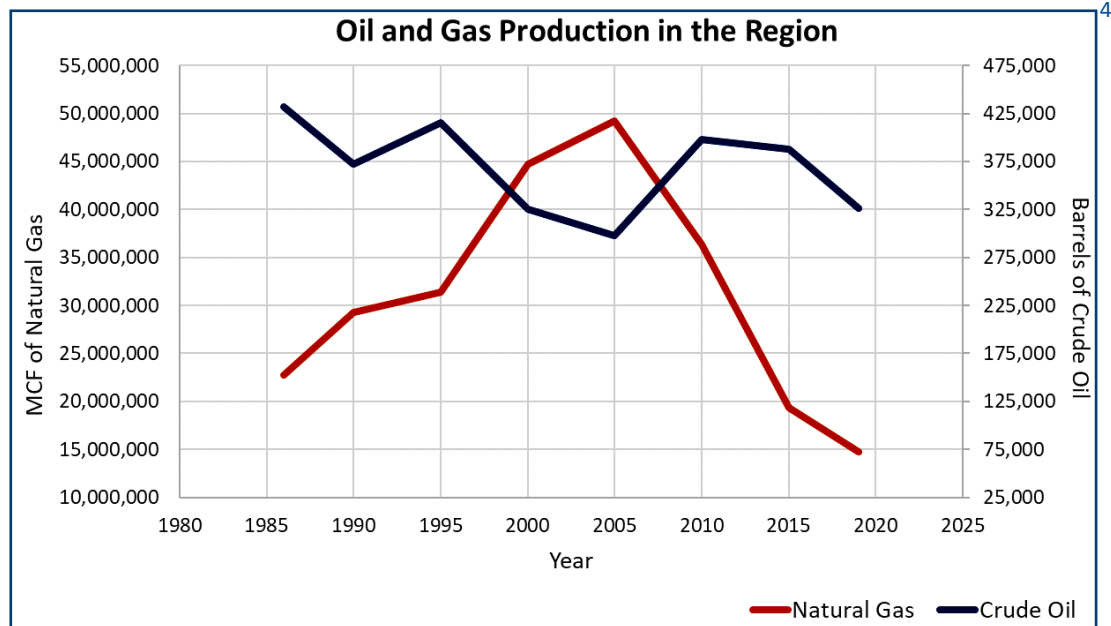




Montana region boasts excellent wind power opportunities, mainly in southwestern Blaine County.³

The region also has a fair amount of oil and gas production. According to 2019 data, the counties in the Bear Paw Development District produced 325,865 barrels of crude oil at \$50.28/barrel, which equates to approximately \$16,384,492 in sales.^{4,5} The region also produced 15,622,985 MCF (one thousand cubic feet) of natural gas in 2018 equating to approximately \$47,181,414 in revenues.^{4,6}

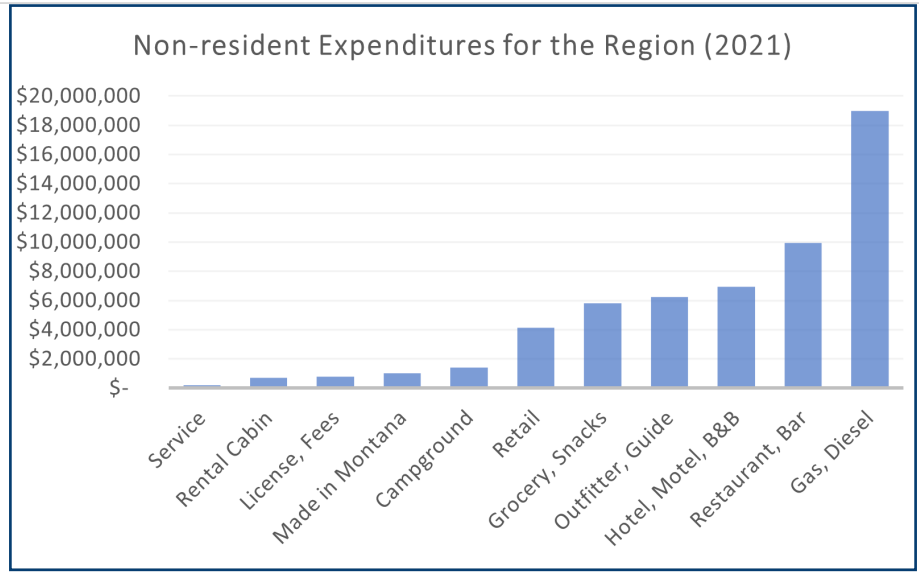
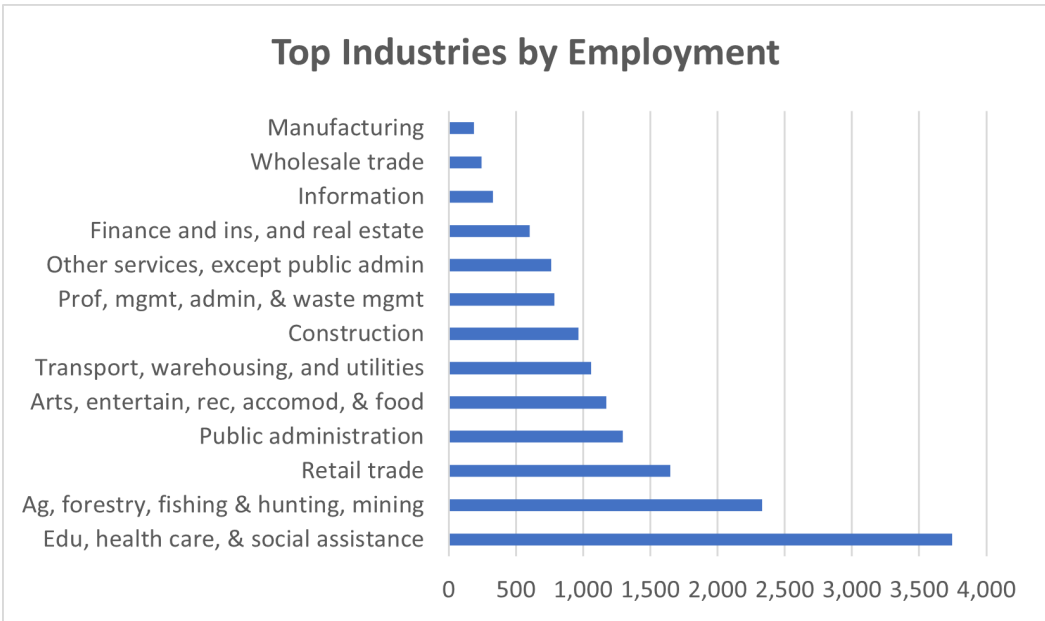
While these natural resources have an important role in the region’s economy, the major industry of the region is agriculture. The agriculture economy is largely based on wheat crops and beef cattle along with pulse crops and other livestock products. Northern Montana is home to the Golden Triangle, which is considered the world mecca for wheat production.⁷ In 2017, counties in the Bear Paw Economic Development District produced 52,810,343 bushels of wheat, which equates to \$262,353,000 in sales.⁸ In 2017, Chouteau County was the top ranking county in Montana for the production of winter wheat and produced 32.8% more winter wheat than the second-highest producing county in the state.⁹ Ranching and beef cattle production are also key factors in the region’s agriculture economy and in 2017 alone the region saw approximately \$169,638,000 in beef sales.¹⁰





While not one of the highest revenue sources for the region, the tourism industry plays an important role in the area's economy. The region has many outdoor resources that attract visitors to the area, including the Missouri River Breaks National Monument, the Bear Paw Mountains, Little Rocky Mountains, Highwood Mountains, and Sweetgrass Hills; Fresno, Tiber, and Nelson Reservoirs; the Marias, Missouri, and Milk Rivers; and various wildlife management areas and public lands. These natural features attract visitors to hunt, fish, boat, camp, hike and recreate in the region's expansive outdoor amenities. Information compiled by the University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research shows that the region received over \$48 million in non-resident expenditures in 2018, the majority of which came from gas and diesel sales and outfitting and guiding services.¹¹

The region is home to a wealth of history with Fort Benton being the first community established in the state. Other historic sites include Fort Assiniboine, the Wahkpa Chu'gn Buffalo Jump, numerous stops on the Montana Dinosaur Trail, Havre Beneath the Streets, and other sites throughout the area. The region has a total of 42 sites, districts, and structures listed on the National Register of Historic Places. While the region is on route to more widely known tourism destinations, such as Glacier National Park, it has many reasons for visitors to stop on the way, and residents have identified the tourism industry as an area with potential for economic growth.





Top Left: Historic Fort Benton Bridge, Fort Benton, Chouteau County. Photo by Rainee Komrosky.



Top Middle: Rock formation at Mission Canyon on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. Photo by Megan Blauwkamp.



Top Right: Rocky Boy Powwow, Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. Photo by Patricia Faith.



Bottom: Hikers head into the Sweetgrass Hills north of Chester in Liberty County. Photo by BPDC staff.



Infrastructure assets in the region are limited. Individual communities continue to experience challenges caused by aging infrastructure in water, wastewater, bridge, and road systems. With small populations and large land area, the tax base does not lend itself to making significant infrastructure investments and upgrades. However, with the assistance of Bear Paw Development Corporation, local governments are able to access state and federal resources to make needed upgrades to local community infrastructure. In addition to local water, wastewater, bridge, and road systems, the region has several infrastructure assets that play an

integral role in the sustainability of northern Montana communities. The St. Mary Diversion Dam is located on the St. Mary River just below the Lower St. Mary Lake, and water from this system provides irrigation and drinking water to a good portion of the Hi-Line of Montana via the Milk River. In 2020, the Diversion suffered a catastrophic failure in drop structure five and required immediate repair. In addition to drop structure five, drop structure two was also replaced to make repairs more efficient and to preserve the longevity of the Diversion system. In addition to the St. Mary Diversion, the region is in

the process of developing the North Central Montana Regional Water System, which includes a treatment plant and over 50 miles of pipeline spanning across the region from the Tiber Reservoir. The project is an effort of the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation and the State of Montana to provide water to over 10,000 households with an estimated population of 28,000. The system will not only serve the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation but will impact numerous off-reservation communities as well and currently involves 22 participating water systems.¹³



Above: Fresno Dam 14 miles west of Havre, MT, just below Fresno Reservoir on the Milk River. The Fresno Reservoir is fed by the St. Mary's River that originates in Glacier National Park. Photo by BPDC staff.

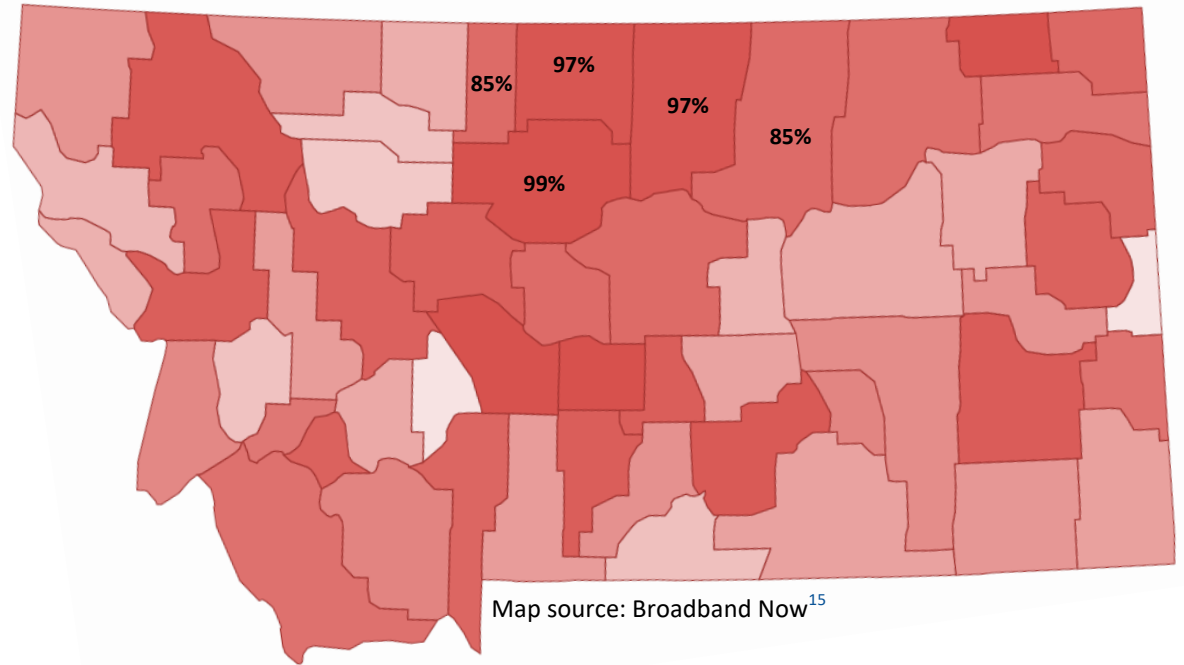
Left: Pugsley Suspension Bridge over the Marias River in Liberty County. Photo by Amanda Moss.



Broadband is an important and growing infrastructure asset in Montana, and since 2011 there has been over \$248 million in fiber investment made by rural telecoms to increase broadband capacity.¹⁴ The cost to provide broadband infrastructure is expensive in rural areas compared to locations with greater population density. In the Bear Paw District, at least 84% of each county's population has access to internet at 25 mbps or greater, which is a significant improvement from previous years.¹⁵ As a result of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, the importance of broadband infrastructure was certainly emphasized, and communities recognize an opportunity in expanding telework and telecommunications in rural northern Montana.

Northern Montana has established transportation infrastructure mainly in the presence of the BNSF (Burlington Northern Santa Fe) Railway that weaves through the Hi-Line and maintains spurs throughout the region. BNSF provides a huge asset in the transportation of goods and products to and from the region and is also a major employer for the region. During the CEDS outreach process, community members repeatedly noted the importance of the BNSF Railway as a pillar of the economy and an important source of employment. The region also hosts two Amtrak stations, one in Malta and one in Havre, that are part of the route from Chicago to Seattle. In addition to the railroad,

Percent of County Population with Internet Access of 25mbps or Greater



Map source: Broadband Now¹⁵

the region is influenced by the location of Highway 2 that runs east to west throughout the entire state and connects the region to Glacier National Park, an important tourism destination. The northern Montana region is connected to other economic hubs such as Great Falls and Billings via major road networks, and residents frequently must travel for important goods and services that are not available in more rural areas. The region has several public transit providers that coordinate

to transport residents throughout the district. These providers include the North Central Montana Transit, Liberty County Transit, Fort Belknap Transit Service, and Chippewa Cree Tribal Transit. The region is also home to several ports of entry for the US-Canadian border, including Wild Horse, Willow Creek, Turner, and Whitlash.¹⁶ The region's proximity to Canada provides an excellent opportunity for economic growth in the industries of agriculture, tourism, and transportation.



Three institutions of higher education are located within the region and include Stone Child College on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation, Aaniiih Nakoda College on the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, and Montana State University-Northern in Havre. These institutions offer programs in the sciences, nursing, education, business, arts, automotive and diesel technology, and agriculture. MSU-Northern is one of only a few colleges in the U.S. to offer an automotive technology degree as well as a B.S. in diesel technology, and the University was ranked the #15 college in the nation for student economic mobility.¹⁷ Montana Department of Labor statistics for the North Central Montana region show that health care careers are in the top growing occupations in Montana, including personal care aides, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and medical assistants. Currently, the workforce clusters are dominated by management and professional occupation industries.

Northern Montana has limited health and professional health resources; however, most communities maintain a local clinic. Medical services can be accessed at the Northern Montana Hospital in the city of Havre, which is central to the 5-county region. Also located in Havre are the Bullhook Clinic, several independent specialists, and the Sletten Cancer Center. Reservation communities also offer health centers and clinics for residents. While these institutions are

considered assets to the region, many residents find that they must travel long distances to access health care and specialized medicine, often traveling to Billings, Great Falls, or Kalispell for services. It is incredibly important for rural communities to retain the medical services and clinics that they currently have.

Housing in the region is one of the largest challenges that communities face. Much of the existing housing is extremely aged, and 79% of the existing housing stock was constructed prior to 1990.¹⁸ Throughout several planning processes, including the CEDS, Growth Policies, Housing Assessments, a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning project, and Community Needs Assessments, residents have expressed the need for more quality, affordable housing. Additionally, with the aging population in most communities, senior living facilities are of high priority.

The region is home to two Indian Reservations, Rocky Boy's Reservation and Fort Belknap Reservation, as well as the federally-recognized Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Over 4,000 members of the Chippewa-Cree tribe reside on the Rocky Boy's Reservation.¹⁹ The Fort Belknap Reservation is home to both the Assiniboine, or Nakoda, and the Gros Ventre tribes and has approximately 4,000 members.^{20,21} The Little Shell Chippewa Tribe has a total of over 5,400 members of the Chippewa Indians that are located throughout Montana and

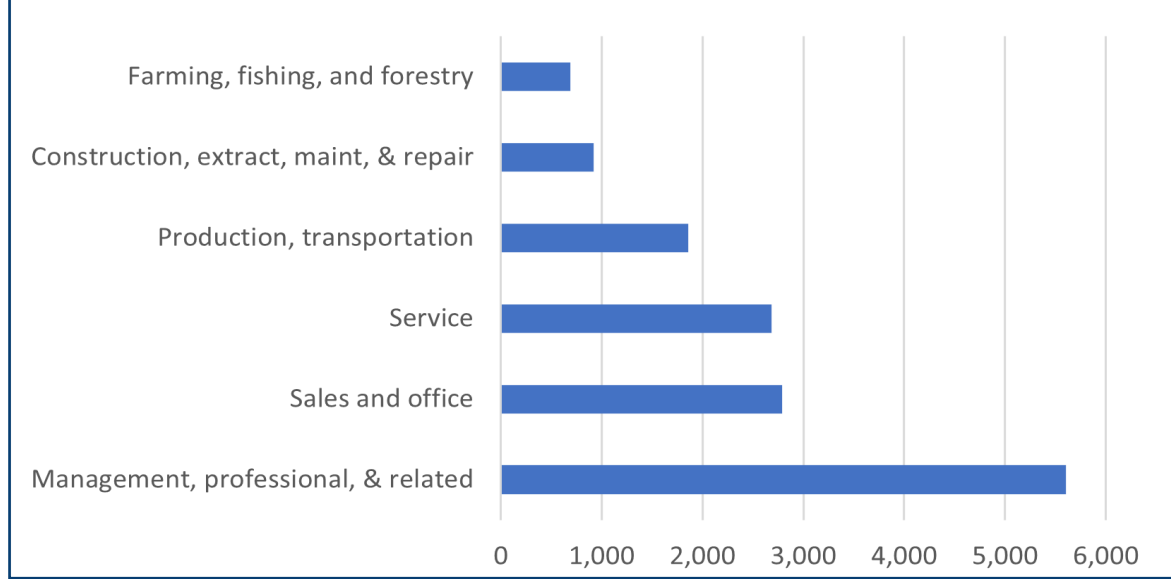
other states and are headquartered in Great Falls.²² The Native American communities in northern Montana are an integral part of the region's history, culture, and economy. The reservation communities continue to see a growth in population, which is a stark contrast to the mostly declining populations in surrounding communities, and this population increase provides opportunity for economic growth and workforce expansion. The tribes maintain a wealth of culture, traditions, language, and history within the region and Montana.



Above: Sculpture on the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. Photo by Sunny Whalawitsa.



Top Occupation Clusters by Employment



Top 10 Growing Occupations in North Central Montana*

24

Based on Percent Increase in Employment

1. Nurse Practitioners	42.50%
2. Cooks	25.70%
3. Medical and Health Services Managers	24.80%
4. Home Health and Personal Care Aides	22.80%
5. Software Developers and Quality Assurance Analysts	21.40%
6. Physician Assistants	21.10%
7. Speech-Language Pathologists	20.90%
8. Packaging and Filling Machine Operators and Tenders	19.20%
9. Tour and Travel Guides	17.60%
10. Fitness Trainers and Aerobics Instructors	17.60%

Bear Paw Development Economic Development District

REGIONAL OVERVIEW



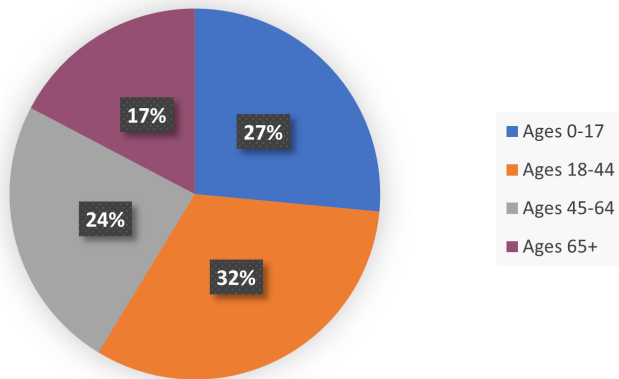
Total Population (2021 Estimate): 35,213

Population Change Since 2010: .6%

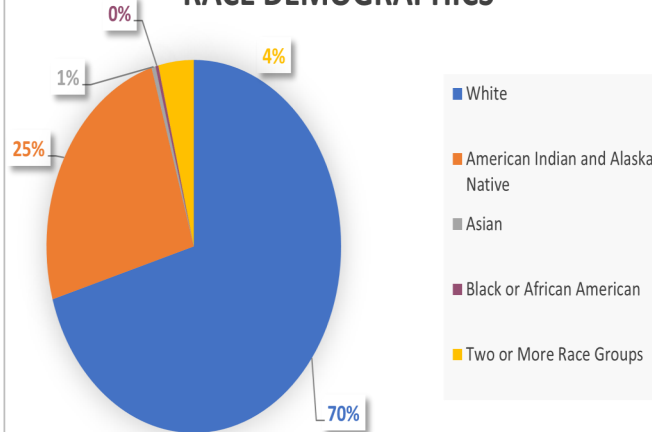
Land Area: 17,670 sq. miles

People per Square Mile: 2

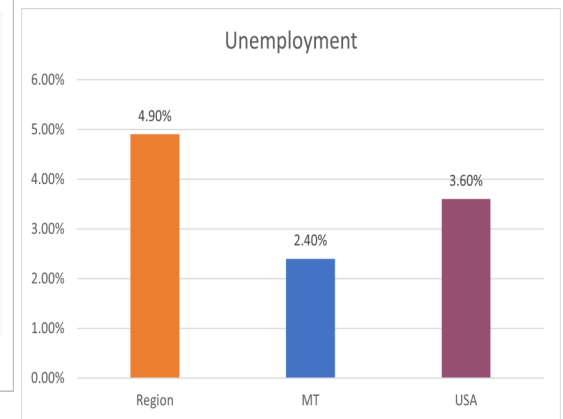
AGE DEMOGRAPHICS



RACE DEMOGRAPHICS



Unemployment



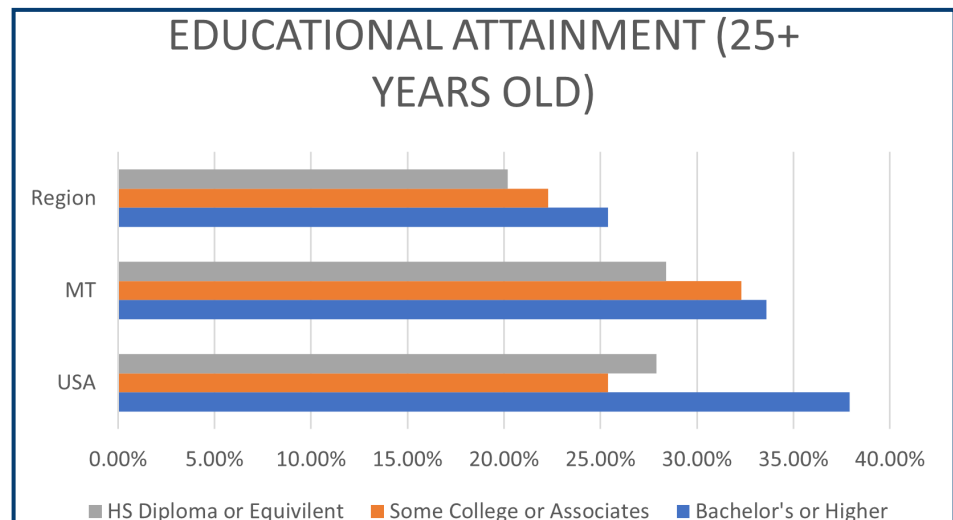
79% of Homes Constructed

Prior to 1990



	Region	MT	USA
Per Capita Income	\$46,581	\$54,970	\$67,521

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25+ YEARS OLD)

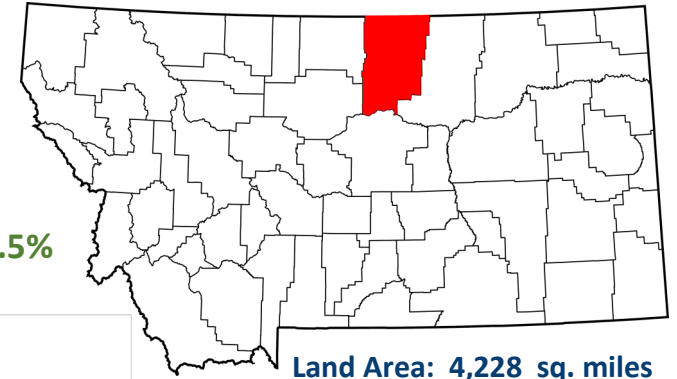


Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year Estimates

2022 BPDC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

BLAINE COUNTY

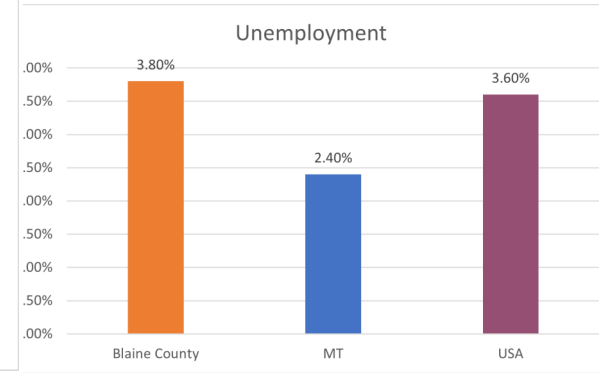
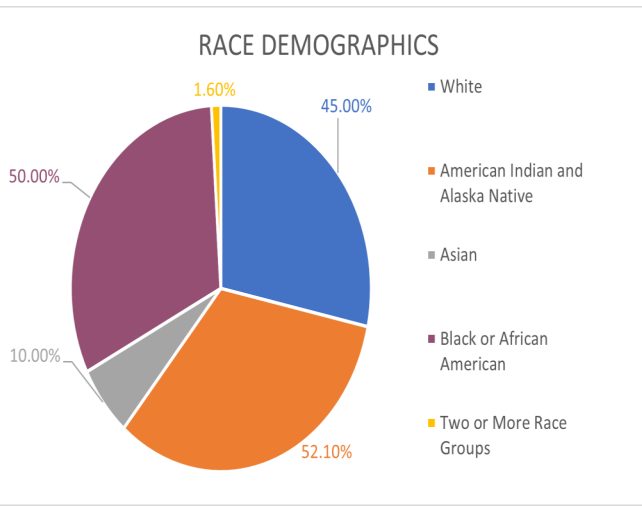
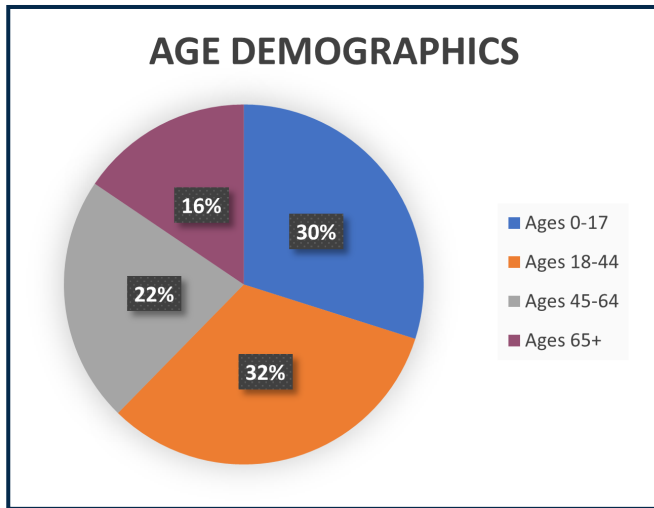
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW



Total Population (2021 Estimate): 6,980

Population Change Since 2010: 7.5%

Land Area: 4,228 sq. miles
People per Square Mile: 1.5

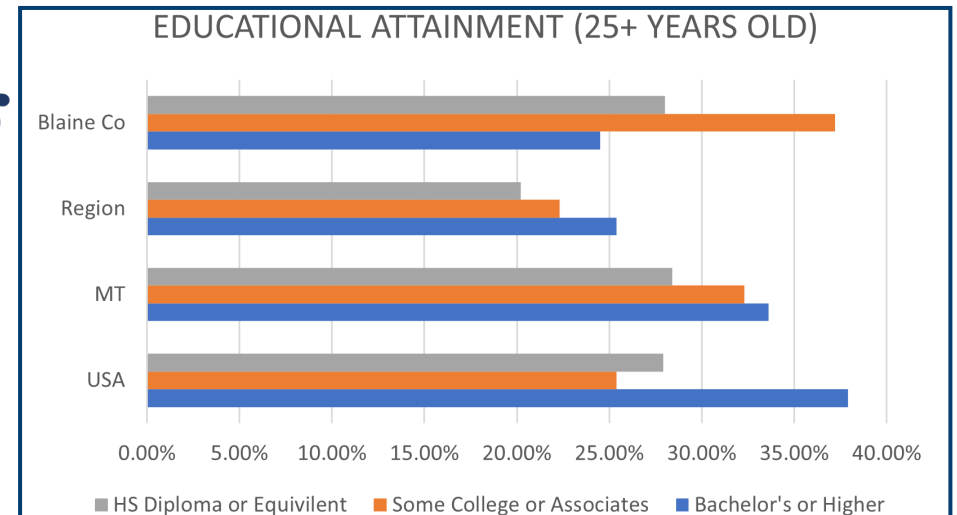


84% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990



Median Household Income:
Median Home Value:

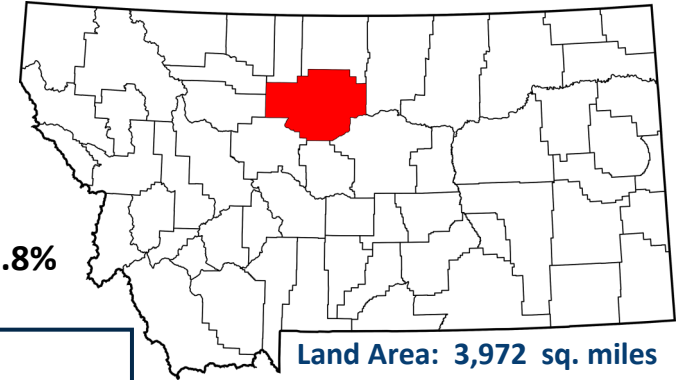
Blaine Co.	\$44,090	\$90,600
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800



Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year Estimates

CHOUTEAU COUNTY

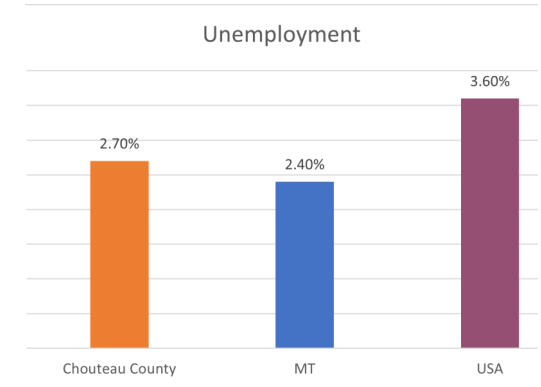
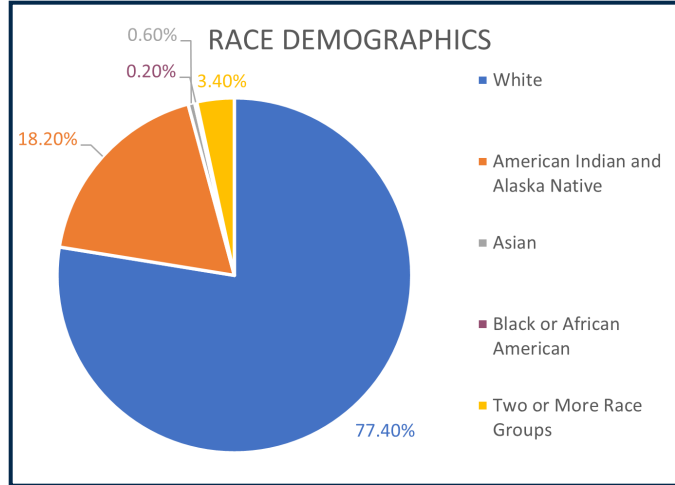
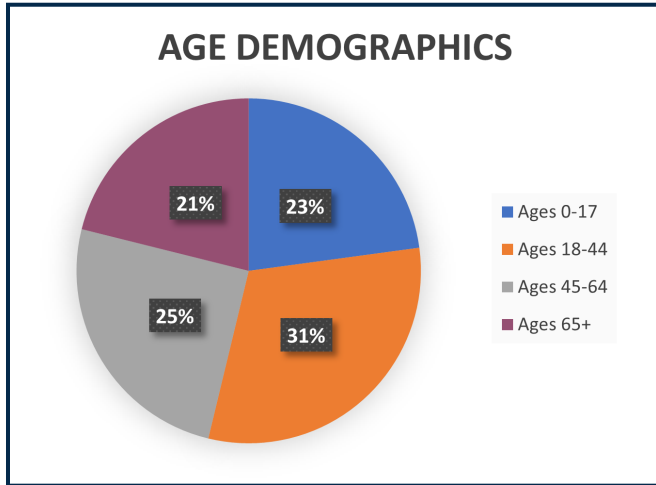
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW



Total Population (2021 Estimate): 5,916

Population Change Since 2010: +1.8%

Land Area: 3,972 sq. miles
People per Square Mile: 1.5



79% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990

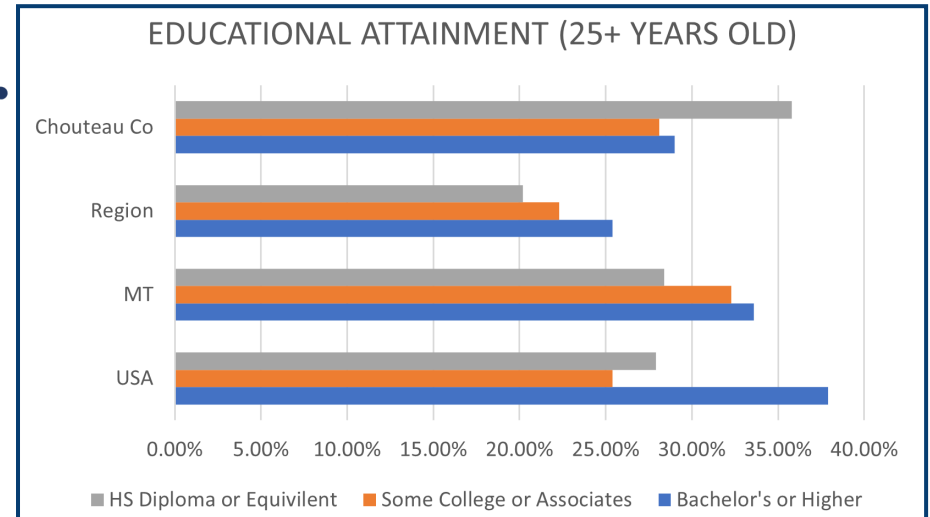


Chouteau Co.

Median
Household
Income:

	Median Household Income	Median Home Value
Chouteau Co.	\$48,017	\$155,700
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800

Median
Home
Value:



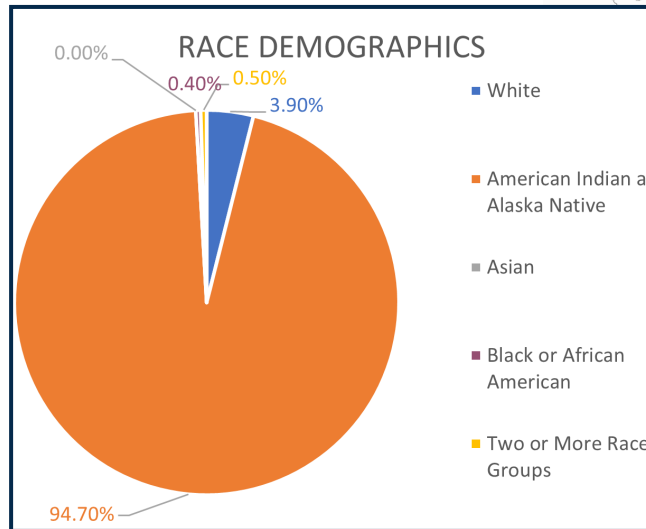
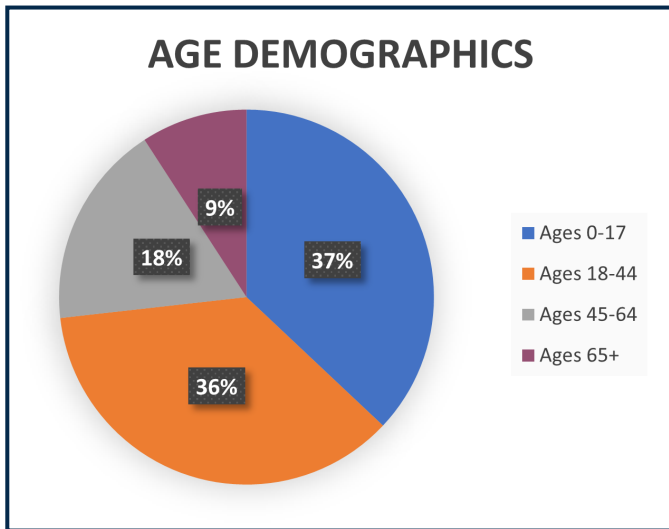
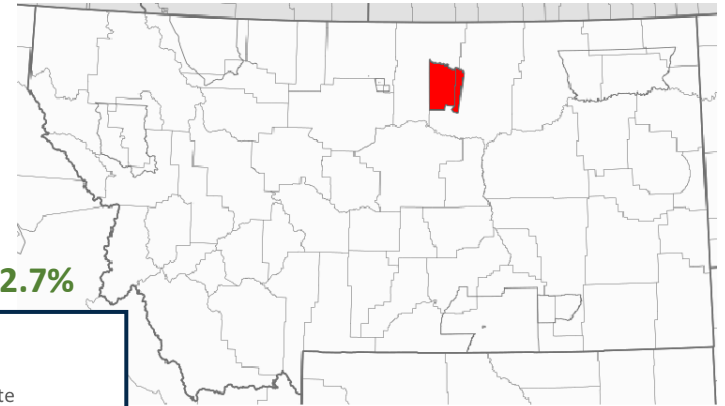
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 201205-year Estimates

Fort Belknap Indian Reservation

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Total Population (2021 Estimate): 3,155

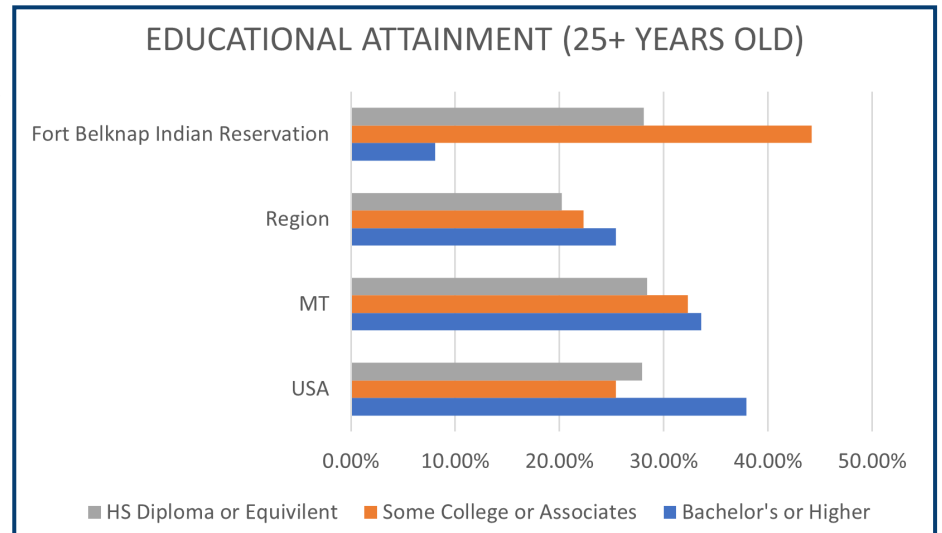
Population Change Since 2010: **12.7%**



**75% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990**



	Median Household Income:	Median Home Value:
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation	\$41,042	\$61,100
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800

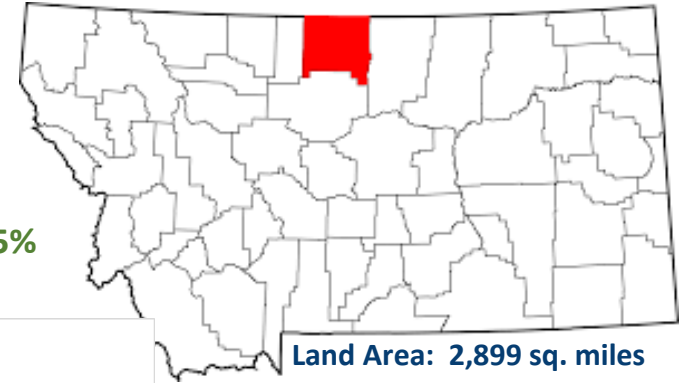


HILL COUNTY

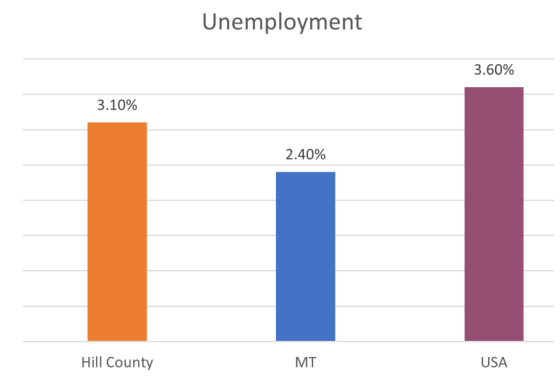
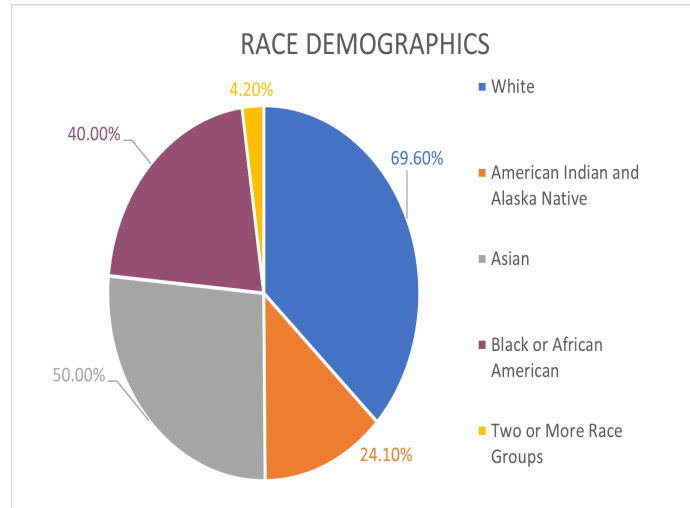
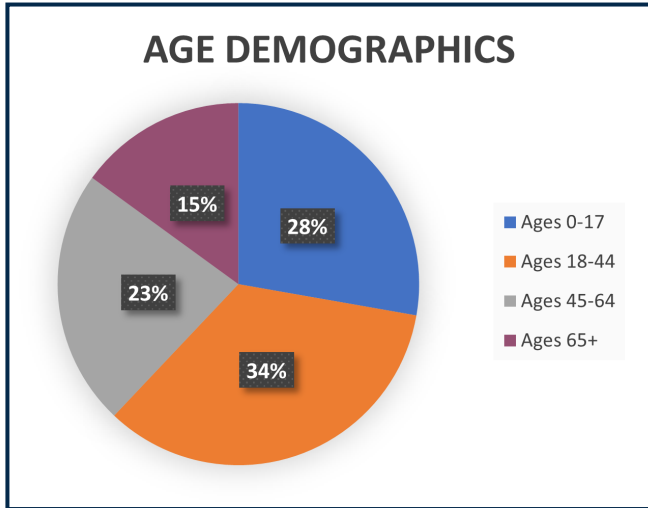
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Total Population (2021 Estimate): 16,179

Population Change Since 2010: .5%



Land Area: 2,899 sq. miles
People per Square Mile: 5.6



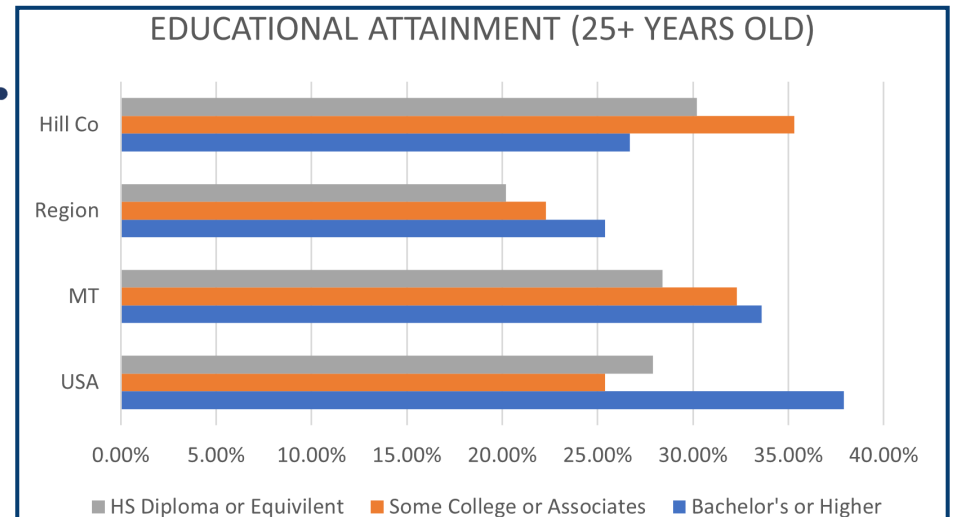
88% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990



Median Household Income:

Median Home Value:

Hill Co.	\$51,881	\$153,800
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800



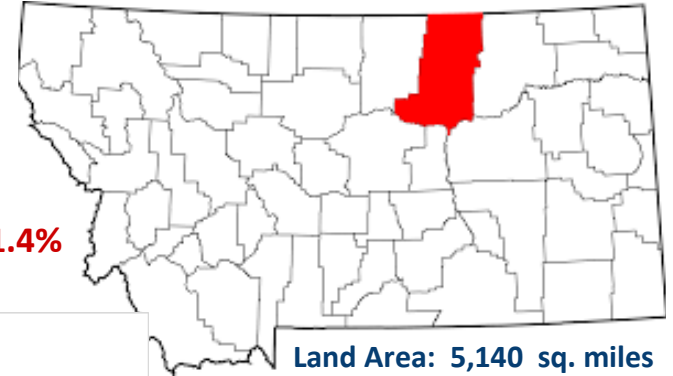
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year Estimates

PHILLIPS COUNTY

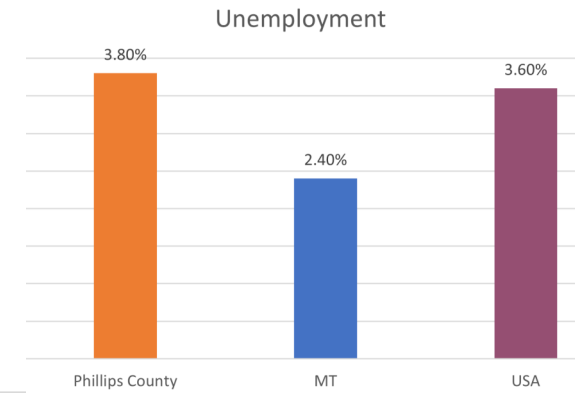
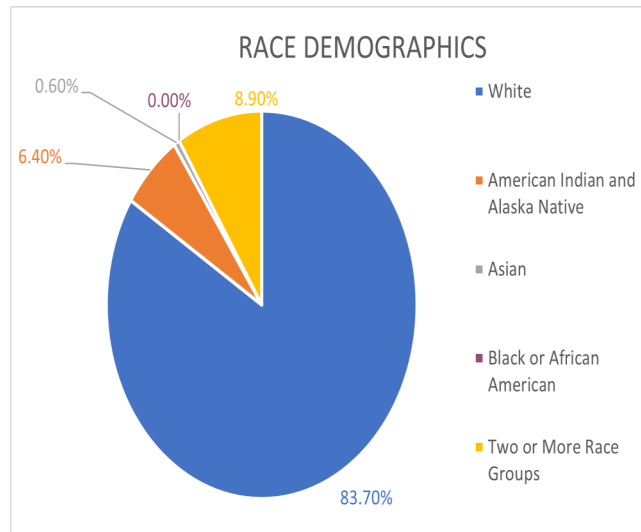
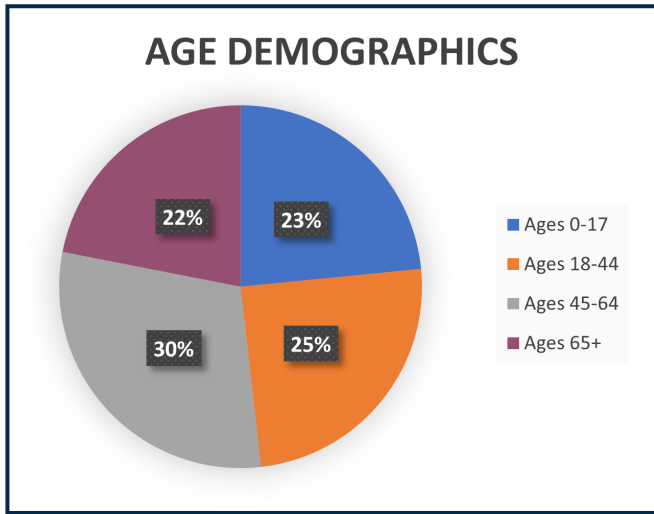
COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Total Population (2021 Estimate): 4,192

Population Change Since 2010: **-1.4%**



Land Area: 5,140 sq. miles
People per Square Mile: 0.8



78% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990



Phillips Co.

MT

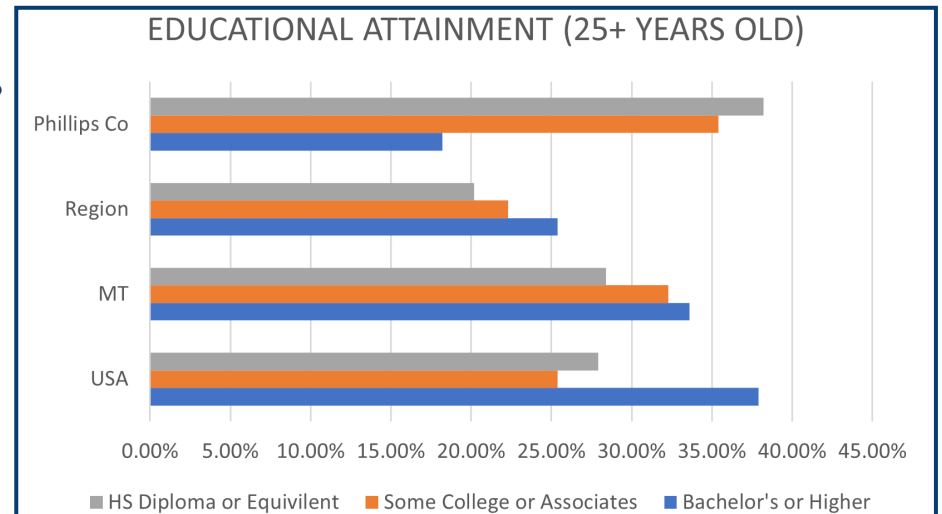
USA

Median
Household
Income:

Phillips Co.	\$47,679	Median Home Value: \$141,600
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800



Poverty:
14.3%

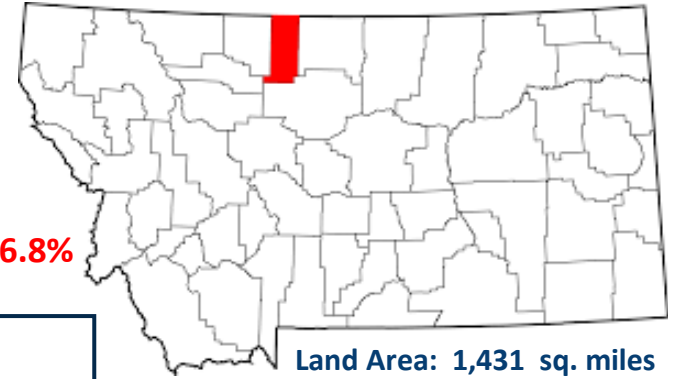


Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year Estimates

2022 BPDC Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

LIBERTY COUNTY

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

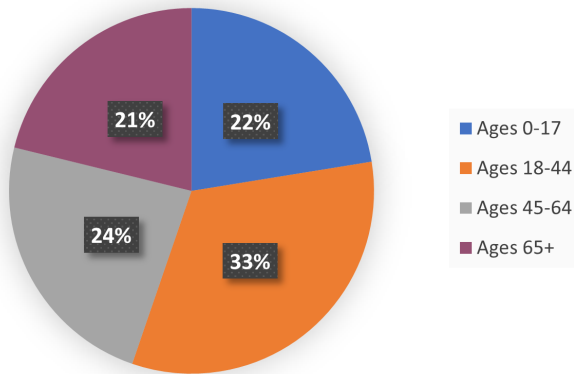


Land Area: 1,431 sq. miles
People per Square Mile: 1.6

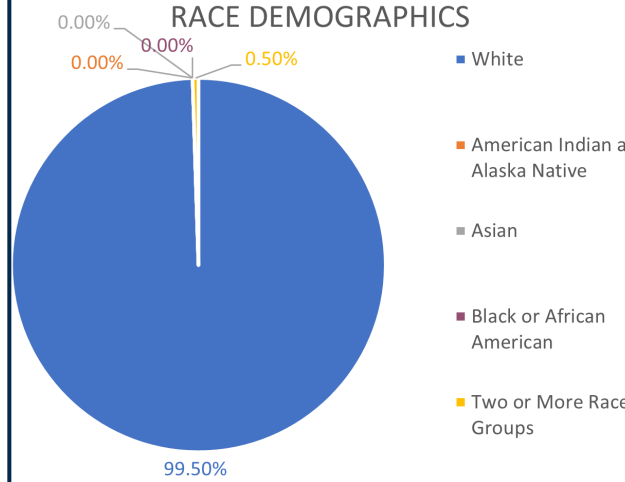
Total Population (2021 Estimate): 1,946

Population Change Since 2010: **-16.8%**

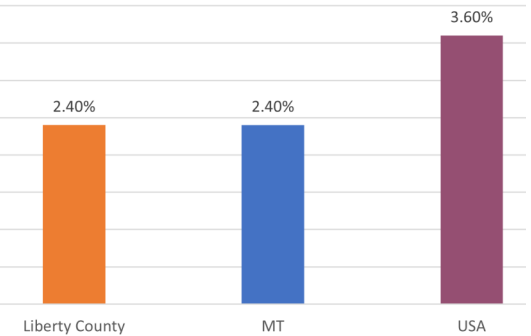
AGE DEMOGRAPHICS



RACE DEMOGRAPHICS



Unemployment



84% of Homes

Constructed Prior to 1990



Liberty Co.

Median Household Income:

Median Home Value:

MT

USA

\$41,240

\$54,970

\$67,521

\$101,600

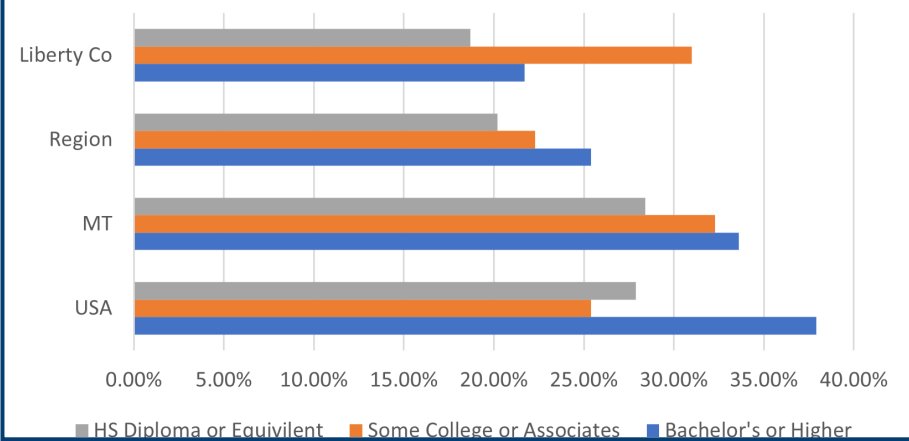
\$244,900

\$229,800



Poverty: 19.0%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25+ YEARS OLD)



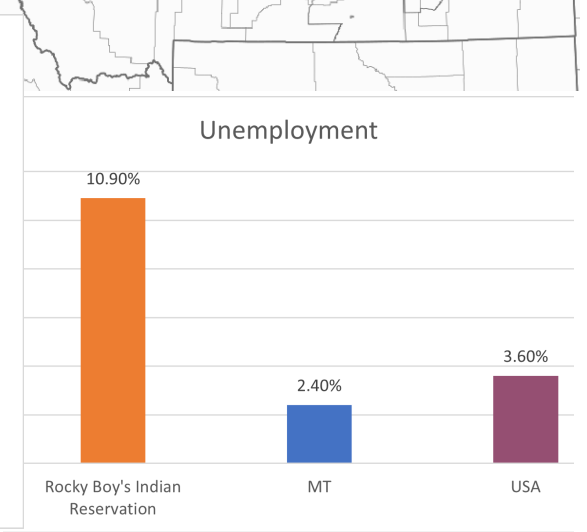
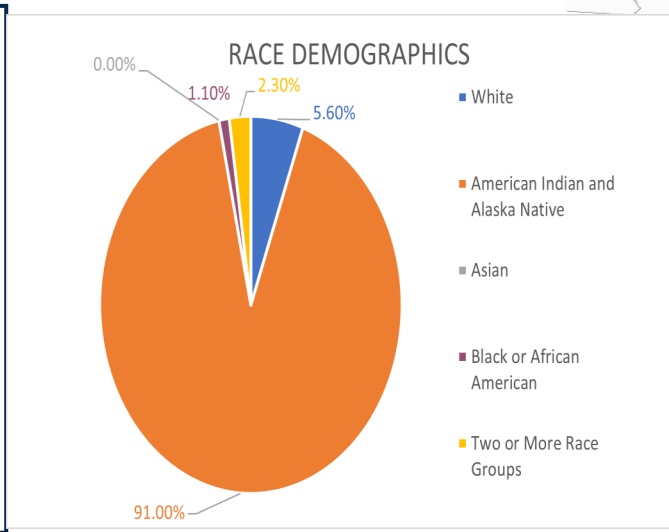
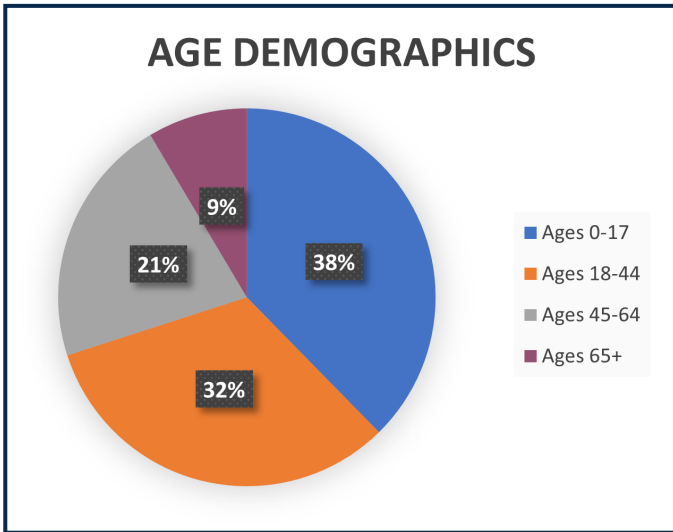
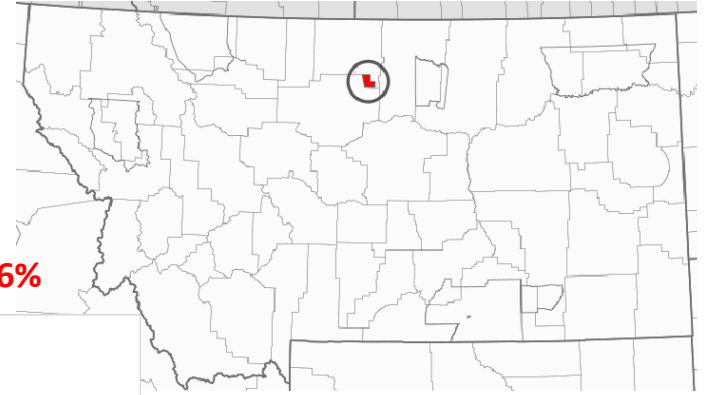
Source: US Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2020 5-year Estimates

Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation

COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

Total Population (2021 Estimate): 2,913

Population Change Since 2010: **-6%**

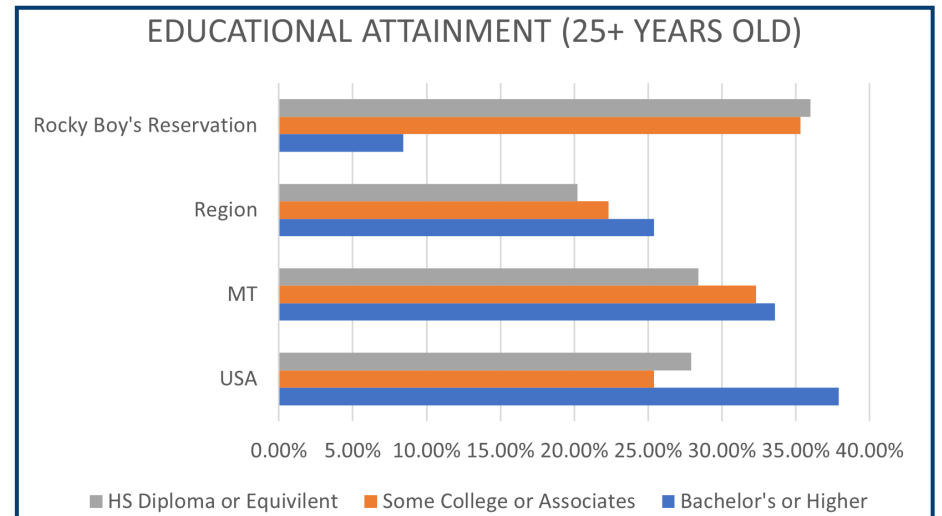


**65% of Homes
Constructed Prior to 1990**



Rocky Boy's Indian
Reservation

	Median Household Income:	Median Home Value:
Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation	\$30,139	\$80,800
MT	\$54,970	\$244,900
USA	\$67,521	\$229,800



The Process





Overview

In developing the CEDS, stakeholder engagement, local plan review, and data analysis played an integral part in identifying regional challenges, economic trends, and opportunities. The following chapter discusses the process by which information was collected and a strategic direction developed. The 2022 CEDS update was based heavily on the information obtained in 2020, and included feedback from the Strategy Committee regarding any needed updates.

Stakeholder engagement involved gathering input from a culturally and economically diverse group of individuals and organizations from throughout the Bear Paw Economic Development District. The following techniques were used to engage the general public and key stakeholders in creating relevant and meaningful economic development strategies:

- Virtual Strategy Committee meetings
- Online surveys
- Social media outreach
- Photo contest
- Marketing in local newspapers and on local radio stations

Community Input

The first step in developing the 2020 CEDS was gathering widespread input using an online survey. Respondents were asked to provide feedback on the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the region. They were also asked to rank an array of community and economic development priorities and provide input on specific projects they would like to see in the region. The Strategy Committee also held a virtual meeting to conduct a SWOT analysis. The combination of survey input from over 160 individual community members and the 20-member Strategy Committee provided a good sense of the region's current strengths, areas of concern, opportunities for growth, and potential threats to development. It is important to note that this survey and Strategy Committee meeting, which occurred at the height of the national shutdown due to coronavirus, were heavily influenced by concerns surrounding effects of the national and global COVID-19 crisis.

After collecting community input and reviewing pertinent demographic and economic data, the Strategy Committee held a second virtual meeting to review all of the information and brainstorm goals and strategies for the CEDS action plan. Following the meeting, another online survey was conducted with Strategy Committee members, BPDC staff, and BPDC board members to collect feedback and input on goals, strategies, and action items. A third and final Strategy Committee

meeting was conducted to review the draft of the CEDS and to give stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback and suggest edits. A draft of the CEDS was published for a 30-day comment period at the beginning of November 2020. The CEDS draft was made available on the Bear Paw Development Corporation website and residents were encouraged to provide feedback on the document. The draft CEDS and open comment period were promoted through Facebook, radio, and marketing in local newspapers. To further promote the CEDS and to gain interest in the final document, BPDC held a photo contest to involve the public in providing visuals for the CEDS and to showcase the region. Community members submitted fantastic photos that are featured throughout this document. Public comments and edits were incorporated into the final document and the 2020 CEDS was adopted by the BPDC Board of Directors in December of 2020.

Bear Paw Development was able to utilize the information obtained for the 2020 CEDS update and present it to the Strategy Committee on two separate occasions in 2022. The Strategy Committee was asked to review the input they provided two years ago to determine what, if anything, is needing updated. The overwhelming consensus from the committee was that the issues identified in 2020 are still widely applicable in 2022.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Agriculture ◆ Farming and ranching ◆ Railroad (BNSF) and businesses/jobs supporting the railroad ◆ Small business environment ◆ Rural setting, quality of life, close-knit communities ◆ Medical facilities/Northern Montana Hospital ◆ Educational opportunities/MSU-Northern ◆ Reservation communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Lack of retail businesses, manufacturers, and large-scale employers ◆ National retailers detract local investment ◆ High housing and rental prices; high-priced goods ◆ Lack of high-paying jobs ◆ Lack of skilled workforce ◆ Aging and deteriorating infrastructure ◆ Lack of investment in downtown/main street ◆ Need for more cultural events, amenities, and recreational opportunities ◆ Government regulations create barriers to business growth and Industry development ◆ Lack of population/aging population ◆ Lack of economic and agricultural diversification ◆ Geographic isolation: transportation issues and access to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Small business growth/expansion ◆ Attraction of new industry/manufacturing ◆ Increase local and international markets for agricultural products ◆ Local meat and grain processing ◆ Growth of tourism industry by hosting special events, highlighting regional attractions, and promoting region as a destination ◆ Additional education/workforce training; MSU-Northern ◆ Improve infrastructure ◆ Removal of blight; downtown investment ◆ Additional planning for resiliency and economic growth ◆ Private- and public-sector partnerships ◆ Diversifying the economy and creating high-paying jobs ◆ Improve housing ◆ Improve technology/internet access ◆ Increase health care opportunities ◆ Explore alternative energy opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ COVID-19 pandemic; or a similar future pandemic ◆ National and global economic downturn ◆ Negative impacts to supply chains ◆ Reduction in agricultural trade ◆ Loss of jobs ◆ Loss of a major employer, BNSF or Northern Montana Hospital ◆ Natural disaster/climate change/extreme weather events ◆ St. Mary's Dam failure/lack of water resources ◆ Volatility of the agriculture market ◆ Aging and decreasing population ◆ Aging infrastructure ◆ Lack of tourism industry (especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic) ◆ Aging housing/high housing prices



Key Findings

Residents in the northern Montana region are tough, hard-working people that enjoy the quality of life and close-knit communities that the rural region provides. However, the region faces many challenges in working to grow the economy, retain residents, and attract new development. Residents recognize the need to diversify industry, expand access to technology, and think outside of the box to fortify the economy and sustain the region for years to come.

Northern Montana residents feel strongly that agriculture, specifically farming and ranching, is the greatest strength of the region. While residents acknowledge the threats of climate change, extreme weather events, and drought on the agriculture industry, they also feel that agriculture provides a promising area for growth and diversification. Potential opportunities include supporting value-added ag, diversification of crops such as hemp and pulse crops, and adding local meat and grain processing facilities. The region also has few large employers, such as Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway, Northern Montana Hospital, and MSU-Northern, the loss of which would have very negative impacts to the area. Residents want to retain these large institutions for the economic benefits, services, and employment opportunities that they offer.

Residents also feel that supporting local small businesses and attracting manufacturers to the

area will build economic resiliency, especially in light of the negative effects of the 2020 COVID-19 crisis. Several challenges face small businesses in the region, including the remoteness of the area and competition with large retailers that have a substantial online presence and that detract investment in the local economy. Residents feel that supporting small businesses through education, grants, buy-local campaigns, and loans will provide the most opportunity for growing and retaining the business community. Residents also feel that expansion of technology to help the business community reach wider markets is key to helping business growth and recovery.

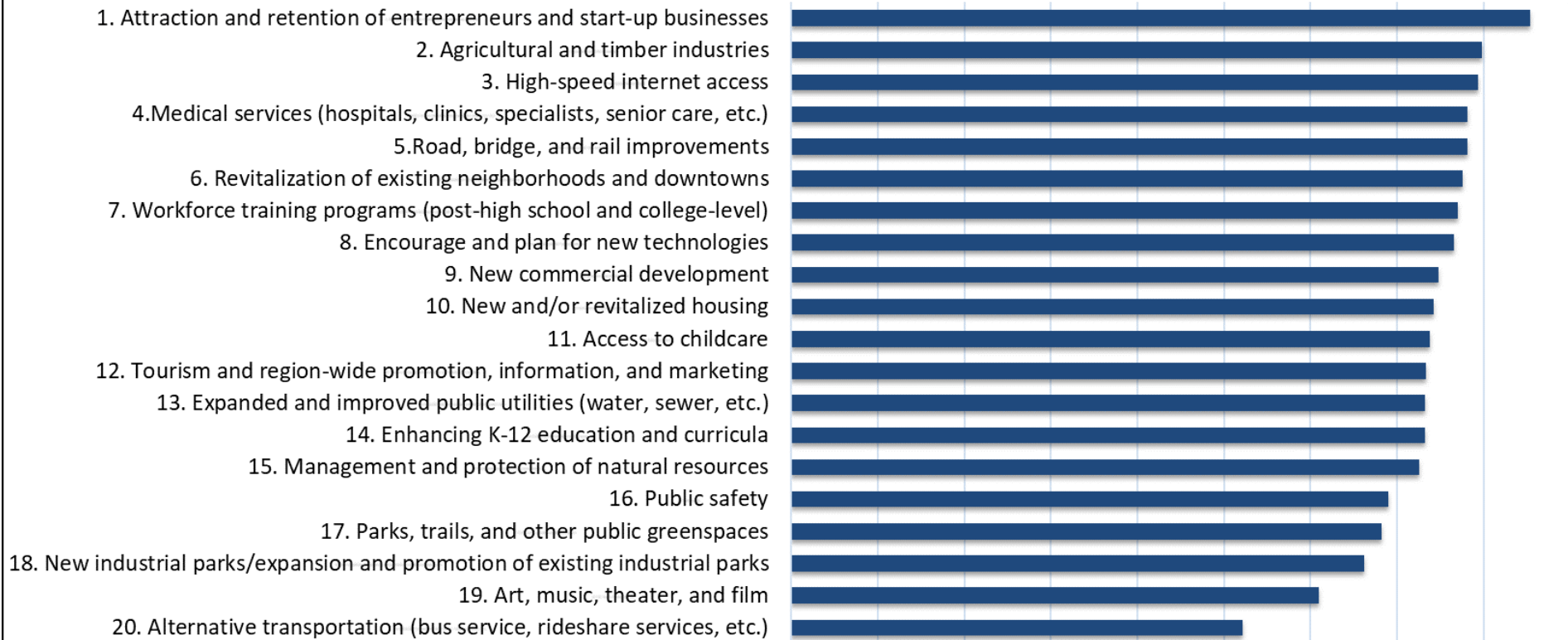
Many residents express that there are difficulties in finding high-paying jobs in the area, and employers note challenges in finding skilled employees. Expanding workforce training, workshops, cultural education, and professional education were identified by residents as a solution to address concerns with the workforce. Residents noted that partnerships with MSU-Northern, Aaniiih Nakoda College, and Stone Child College would be fundamental in developing these resources. Compounding workforce challenges is the high percentage of aging individuals in local communities and the young adult population leaving the area to seek opportunities in larger cities. Increasing workforce training, investing in local amenities, and increasing the availability of technology, telework, and

telecommunication options are all strategies for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce. Another strength identified are the reservation communities. Reservation communities are experiencing consistent and positive population growth and will continue to play an integral role in the region's economy, workforce, and stability. An additional opportunity that may be to the advantage of the region is the very recent and new trend in individuals moving from population-dense cities to more rural areas as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. While it is still too early to see large effects of this population shift, residents acknowledge that it may provide an opportunity for attracting new residents and expanding the workforce through traditional job creation and telework opportunities.

Infrastructure, and often the aging and deterioration of infrastructure, is a constant concern of communities throughout the region. Residents feel strongly that investment in the region's infrastructure is absolutely necessary not only for the long-term resiliency of communities but also for attracting and retaining businesses, manufacturers, and residents. In May of 2020, there was a complete failure in a drop structure of the St. Mary's Diversion Dam system. The St. Mary's Diversion provides water to the Hi-Line for both drinking water and irrigation purposes, and a failure in the system threatens the water supply for



Economic Priorities



Above: In Bear Paw Development’s online Community and Economic Development Survey, respondents were asked to rank a list of economic priorities as “Very Low Priority,” “Low Priority,” “Medium Priority,” “High Priority,” or “Very High Priority.” Responses were weighted and averaged to provide the above results.



the entire region. The drop structure was repaired, but the incident underscored the importance of investing in infrastructure to ensure the availability of necessary services.

In addition to aging infrastructure, residents also feel that high-priced, aging and deteriorating housing in communities throughout the region is a weakness, and they want to see investments made to provide affordable, quality homes and rental units. Likewise, residents want to see investment in downtowns to remove blight and make towns more welcoming and livable. They also want to see expansion in amenities, such as retail business, restaurants, recreation, and attractions. Residents feel that pursuing these types of investments are crucial in retaining and attracting residents and visitors. In the same vein, residents see the tourism industry as a real opportunity for growth. The region has a wealth of historic, cultural, and outdoor resources that can be bolstered to attract visitors and infuse the economy with non-resident spending. Residents want to see the Hi-Line and northern Montana expand and invest in the tourism industry by hosting special events, marketing regional attractions, and promoting the region as a destination.

Residents also want to see support for transportation resources, especially roads and the Amtrak passenger rail service. Amtrak has long been a strength for Hi-Line communities as the service

provides transportation throughout the northern part of the region and connects with major metropolitan areas from Chicago to Seattle. Amtrak had previously reduced services to the area, however they have begun to resume those services on a more limited basis. This resumption has brought more tourism to the area which had been severely limited during the pandemic.

At the forefront of residents' minds during this planning process was the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020 and had major, sweeping impacts to daily life and the economy. The pandemic highlighted the threats and weaknesses of the region but also brought to light the strengths and opportunities that northern Montana possesses. Residents were certainly reminded of the importance for strategic planning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and will utilize the CEDS process to build on future resiliency planning and recovery efforts. While the region, as well as the nation and the global community, faces serious health threats, unemployment, and economic downturn, residents are determined to remain hopeful and thoughtful regarding opportunities for resiliency, strength, and growth now and in the future. The region has since begun to rebuild from the pandemic, however remain vigilant to avoid another outbreak that could lead to a disruption in business.

Plan Review

Reviewing local and regional plans allowed for recognition and incorporation of priorities from local growth policies, tribal CEDS, the North Central Montana Regional Plan,²⁵ the Main Street Montana Project Business Plan,²⁶ community needs assessments, and disaster mitigation plans. These plans identify a need for more housing, workforce training, marketing or tourism, and infrastructure improvements. Workforce availability, tribal colleges, broadband access, tourism development, pursuit of alternative energy sources, and resource development were listed as opportunities.

All five counties and both reservations in the region have completed Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plans. These plans help identify risks, create opportunities for mitigation, and identify key resources and partners in recovery. Priorities from mitigation planning are also incorporated into the CEDS and, specifically, the Disaster and Economic Recovery and Resiliency Strategy in Appendix B. Bear Paw Development is also in the process of contracting a consultant to devise an Economic Resiliency Plan specific to COVID-19 recovery that will be completed in 2022. The combination of community input, research, data collection, and local plan review form the basis of our strategic direction and action plan in the following section of this document.

Action Plan



Photo by Michelle H. Crazy



Vision, Mission, and Goals

The following section summarizes the goals, strategies, and initiatives that will help meet residents' desires to develop value-added agriculture products, attract more residents and visitors, foster the small business community, and train and educate the region's workforce. The action plan builds on findings from the SWOT analysis, incorporates elements from other regional plans, identifies the stakeholders and timeframe, and lists opportunities for the integrated use of other local, state, and federal funds.

Our vision is to build communities, grow businesses, and improve the quality of life for the residents of northern Montana by creating opportunities and success through partnerships, hard work, creativity, and knowledge.

Bear Paw Development staff will utilize the following vision, mission, goals, and action items to help guide their activities, build leadership, foster cooperation, and ensure economic prosperity and resiliency for the region. Bear Paw Development's mission is to be the most responsive and relevant nonprofit economic and community development organization in Montana, focusing on its five-county, two-reservation region of northern Montana. Timely, courteous and knowledgeable assistance to our customers with their project development needs – every time – will be the hallmark of our commitment. Services will be delivered with honesty and integrity and will always be client-focused.



Goal I:

Support economic opportunity and enhance local capacity of the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations



Goal II:

Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region



Goal III:

Assist in the development of food and value-added agriculture projects



Goal IV:

Assist and support entrepreneurs to create new businesses, expand existing businesses, and foster job growth



Goal V:

Continually provide economic and community development planning services to the region



Goal VI:

Enhance the development and delivery of our region's natural and renewable resources, including alternative energy options

Action Plan Matrix

Goal I: Support economic opportunity and enhance local capacity of the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations

Strategies:

- Assist entrepreneurs with capital and collateral needs to start and expand businesses on the reservation
- Offer and promote training opportunities for business planning and business start-up
- Support Tribe-sponsored events through shared marketing strategies and local promotion
- Support opportunities for education through peer-to-peer learning experiences to better understand Tribal government, sovereignty, and on-reservation business models
- Collaborate with Tribal entities to coordinate services, technical assistance, and funding for infrastructure and economic development projects

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/ Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist Reservations with economic and community development needs	High	X	X	X	Tribal Government	BPDC	Technical Assistance
Coordinate with Aaniiih Nakoda College, Stone Child College, and Reservation communities to offer business development	Med	X	X		Bear Paw Development, SBDC	SBA, NADC PTAC	Technical Assistance
Provide technical assistance to Fort Belknap to look into options for a new administration building	Med	X			Tribal Government	USDA RD	Technical Assistance
Initiate conversations with the Tribes to create a virtual, peer-to-peer learning experience and other opportunities to share best practices	Low	X			Bear Paw Development	Tribal Entities, Triangle Communications, Local Governments	Peer-to-Peer Learning



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Strategies:

- Assist communities in developing and securing funding for water, wastewater, bridge, and other infrastructure projects
- Conduct outreach to residents to relay project goals and to help community members understand funding mechanisms for infrastructure upgrades
- Conduct outreach to the Montana State Legislature to encourage support of rural infrastructure projects and funding programs
- Encourage educational opportunities for local municipalities to maintain planning tools and assist in prioritizing and budgeting infrastructure projects
- Support the development of quality, affordable housing throughout the region
- Support investment in broadband and high-speed internet throughout the region to assist businesses in expanding marketing and telework opportunities
- Encourage trade opportunities with Canada and work with state and federal agencies to ensure border access in the region
- Support investment in transportation infrastructure, including the railway, passenger rail service, essential air service, public transportation systems, and highway and road systems
- Support investment in outdoor recreation assets, including trails, bike pathways, camping facilities, fishing and hunting resources, and waterways

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist District members with preparation of applications for Intercap Loans from the	Low	X	X	X	Local Government	BPDC, MT Board of Investments	Technical Assistance



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Provide project planning assistance and program administration of the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) for District members	Low	X	X		Local Government	BPDC, MDT, FHWA	Technical Assistance
Continue to manage the housing loan programs for the City of Havre and the City of Harlem	Med	X	X	X	City of Havre, City of Harlem	BPDC, CDBG	Implementation
Assist the City of Harlem with the planning and implementation of improvements to its wastewater system	Med		X		City of Harlem	BPDC, TSEP, RRGL, CDGB, USDA-RD	Technical Assistance
Assist the City of Harlem with the planning and implementation of upgrades to its storm drain system	Med		X		City of Harlem	BPDC, DNRC	Technical Assistance
Assist the City of Harlem with the planning and implementation of improvements to its water system	High	X	X		City of Harlem	BPDC, USDA-RD, DNRC	Implementation
Assist the City of Chinook with implementation of upgrades to the City's drinking water system	High	X	X		City of Chinook	BPDC, USDA-RD, TSEP, DNRC	Implementation
Provide technical assistance to Blaine County as it proceeds with a long-term plan to upgrade its bridge inventory	Med	X	X		Blaine County	BPDC, TSEP	Technical Assistance



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Secure funding to address potential deficiencies with the bridges in Chouteau County and provide assistance in implementing a bridge replacement plan	High	X	X		Chouteau County	BPDC, TSEP	Planning and Implementation
Provide technical assistance to Chouteau County as they make upgrades to the Missouri River Medical Center	Med	X	X		Chouteau County	BPDC, MPMC, CDBG, CDBG ED, USDA-RD, Private Industry	Planning and Implementation
Assist the town of Geraldine with the planning and implementation of improvements to its wastewater system	High	X	X		Town of Geraldine	BPDC, USDA-RD, TSEP, CDBG, DNRC	Implementation
Assist the City of Fort Benton with the development of their recreational trail system	Low	X	X		City of Fort Benton, Fort Benton Trails Committee	Fort Benton Chamber of Commerce, BPDC, FWP	Technical Assistance
Assist the City of Fort Benton with the planning and implementation of improvements to the City's drinking water system	High	X	X		City of Fort Benton	BPDC, TSEP, DNRC, SRF	Planning and Implementation
Assist the Highwood Water and Sewer District to secure funding for wastewater system improvements	Med	X	X		Chouteau County, Highwood	BPDC, RRGL	Planning and Implementation
Assist the Town of Big Sandy with planning and implementation of improvements to their storm drain system	Med	X	X		Town of Big Sandy	BPDC, TSEP, DNRC, SRF	Planning and Implementation



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist the Town of Big Sandy in seeking and securing funding for capital costs associated with connecting to the North Central Montana Regional Water Project	Med	X	X		Town of Big Sandy	BPDC, SRF, Montana Board of Investments	Technical Assistance
Provide technical assistance to the Town of Big Sandy as the Town seeks to secure funding for the construction of a new community pool	Low	X	X		Town of Big Sandy	BPDC, LWCF	Technical Assistance
Assist the Town of Highwood with planning and implementation of wastewater system upgrades	Med	X	X		Chouteau Co, Highwood	BPDC, RRGL	Planning and Implementation
Assist Hill County to secure funding for the planning and implementation of improvements to the Rudyard Senior Center	Low	X	X		Hill County, Rudyard	BPDC, CDBG, USDA	Technical Assistance
Assist Hill County with planning and implementation of wastewater system upgrades to RSID #21	High	X	X		Hill County	BPDC, TSEP, CDBG	Planning and Implementation
Provide technical assistance to Hill County as it implements a bridge replacement plan	Med	X	X		Hill County	BPDC, TSEP	Planning and Implementation



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist Hill county in securing grant funding to construct and maintain recreational trails in Beaver Creek Park	Low	X	X		Hill County, Havre Trails, Inc.	BPDC, FWP	Technical Assistance
Assist Hill County in implementing, improvements to the control system at the Hill County Detention Facility	High	X			Hill County	BPDC, DLA	Implementation
Assist Hill County in implementing video security system improvements to the Hill County Courthouse	High	X			Hill County	BPDC, FEMA, MT DES	Implementation
Assist Hill County in seeking funding for new fire response vehicles for the Bear Paw Volunteer Fire Department	Low	X			Hill County, Bear Paw Volunteer Fire Department	BPDC, AFG	Technical Assistance
Assist Hill County in securing and administering grant funding to obtain measuring devises for the Beaver Creek Reservoir	High	X			Hill County	BPDC, DNRC	Implementation
Provide technical assistance to Hill County in the planning and implementation of upgrades to the Milk River Levee	Med	X	X	X	Hill County	BPDC, Army Corps of Engineers, EDA	Technical Assistance
Assist the City of Havre in securing grant funding for infrastructure improvements at the Havre Beneath the Streets Museum	Low	X	X		Havre Beneath the Streets, City of Havre	BPDC, Tourism Grant	Technical Assistance



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist the City of Havre in planning for a new sewer system for the Clear Creek Trailer Court	Med	X	X		City of Havre, Clear Creek Housing Co-op	BPDC, DNRC	Technical Assistance and Planning
Assist the City of Havre in securing funding for water line improvements on Boulevard Avenue	Med	X	X		City of Havre	BPDC, TSEP, DNRC, RRGL, USDA, SRF	Technical Assistance, Planning, and Implementation
Assist the City of Havre in securing funding to improve the City's storm drain system	High	X	X		City of Havre	BPDC, TSEP, USDA- RD, SRF	Planning and Implementation
Assist the City of Havre in securing grant funding for the planning and implementation of necessary upgrades to the Havre Eagles Manor facility	Med	X	X		City of Havre, Havre Eagles Manor	BPDC, CDBG, USDA	Planning and Implementation
Assist Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation to secure funding for a new fire truck	Med	X	X		Tribal Government	Rocky Boy Planning Department, AFG	Technical Assistance
Provide technical assistance and identify funding opportunities for the Town of Chester's storm drain system repairs	Med	X	X		Town of Chester	BPDC, DNRC, TSEP	Technical Assistance
Assist Liberty County in identifying funding for Courthouse renovation or relocation	Med	X	X		Liberty County	BPDC, USDA, Private	Technical Assistance



Goal II: Support the maintenance and enhancement of the physical infrastructure of the region

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Provide technical assistance to the City of Malta as it works to implement a project to address deficiencies in the City's drinking water system	Med	X	X		City of Malta	BPDC, TSEP, RRGL	Planning and Implementation
Assist the City of Malta in securing funding for the planning and implementation of upgrades to the Hi-Line Retirement Center facility	Med	X	X		City of Malta, Hi-Line Retirement Center	BPDC, CDBG, USDA	Planning and Implementation
Work to plan and implement projects to develop the Malta Business and Industry Development District (MBIDD) and seek to establish a Targeted Economic Development District (TEDD) for the MBIDD	High	X	X	X	City of Malta	PhillCo Economic Growth Council	Planning and Implementation
Assist the Town of Dodson with the implementation of upgrades to the Town's wastewater system	High	X	X		Town of Dodson	BPDCTSEP, CDBG	Implementation



Goal III: Assist in the development of food and value-added agriculture projects

Strategies:

- Assist entrepreneurs in creating and developing value-added products in the region
- Support the development of local processing facilities, particularly meat and pulse crop processing, as well as the infrastructure needed for these types of facilities
- Provide guidance and education in creating cooperative organizations for a variety of economic and community development initiatives
- Support the development and research of organic farming initiatives
- Enhance the efforts of local and regional farmers markets to increase availability of food and sustainability of locally grown products
- Offer and promote training opportunities tailored to value-added agriculture activities, such as food safety, Made in Montana, and cottage industry guidelines
- Foster relationships among commercial buyers and local agriculture producers to enhance markets and to encourage a greater local market share
- Collaborate with federal, state, and local agricultural entities to assist farmers working to implement new cropping methods and farming techniques

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/ Partners	Type of Assistance
Retain and enhance the Food and Agriculture Development Center (FADC) to provide business assistance, education, and resource development to local farmers, ranchers, and value-added ag producers	High	X	X	X	MT Department of Agriculture	BPDC	Technical Assistance
Research the feasibility of a hemp fiber processing facility in Chinook	High	X	X		Private Industry; Co-ops	FADC, BPDC, MTDOC	Technical Assistance



Goal III: Assist in the development of food and value-added agriculture projects

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Utilize the services and resources of the FADC to promote energy efficiency opportunities for ag-related operations	Med	X	X	X	Private Industry	BPDC, USDA RD, USDA REAP	Technical Assistance
Partner with the Montana State University-Northern Bio-Energy Center on the potential development of a biofuels processing facility	Low		X	X	MSU-Northern, Local Government	FADC	Technical Assistance
Provide business planning and technical assistance through the FADC to producers developing greenhouse facilities	Med	X	X	X	Local Producers	FADC, MT Dept. of Ag, USDA	Technical Assistance
Provide technical assistance to groups interested in developing businesses based on the cooperative model	Med	X	X	X	Local Groups	FADC, MCDC	Technical Assistance
Assist Hill County with the Montana Agro-Energy Industrial Park to develop shovel-ready sites for new businesses	High	X	X	X	Hill County, Private Developers	FADC, MT Dept. of Commerce, EDA, USDA	Technical Assistance and Planning
Assist local schools in implementing Farm to School Programs	Med	X	X	X	Local Schools	Local Producers, FADC, USDA	Technical Assistance
Explore the opportunity and feasibility of an organic agricultural research station within the region	Low	X	X	X	Private Industry	MSU-Northern, FADC, USDA, MT Dept. of Ag	Technical Assistance and Planning
Assist local entrepreneurs in developing feedlots, slaughterhouses, and meat processing facilities	High	X	X		Private Industry	FADC/BPDC, USDA, MT Dept. of Ag., BPDC	Technical Assistance, Planning, and Implementation



Goal IV: Assist and support entrepreneurs to create new businesses, expand existing businesses, and foster job growth

Strategies:

- Encourage the growth of telework opportunities through marketing and employer/employee training
- Assist in business development through financing programs for business expansion and start-up
- Analyze the needs of business owners and entrepreneurs and work to understand how to create greater economic resiliency in times of economic downturn
- Offer and promote training opportunities and workshops to businesses, including marketing, financial management, business planning, and technology integration
- Assist local businesses and entrepreneurs in developing effective technology uses and strategies to increase sales and become more competitive in larger markets
- Collaborate with economic development organizations and educational institutions to develop industry-specific workforce training programs
- Support investment in, and development of, the region’s tourism industry through planning efforts, lending activities, TIFF districts, and other funding resources

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Retain and enhance the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to assist local entrepreneurs with business startups and business expansion	High	X	X	X	BPDC/SBDC	SBA, MT Dept. of Commerce	Technical Assistance, Business Counseling, Resource Development
Provide business training and workshops in marketing, business planning, financial analysis, and other relevant topics	Med	X	X	X	SBDC	SBA, MT Dept. of Commerce, BPDC	Training, Business Counseling, Resource Development



Goal IV: Assist and support entrepreneurs to create new businesses, expand existing businesses, and foster job growth

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Conduct a region-wide business survey and compile a report identifying current needs of the business community in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic	High	X			SBDC/BPDC	Local Businesses, MT Dept. of Commerce, SBA, EDA	Technical Assistance and Planning
Based on a region-wide business needs survey, provide relevant training and support for businesses to recover from impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic	High	X	X		SBDC/BPDC	Local Businesses, MT Dept. of Commerce, SBA, EDA	Technical Assistance, Business Counseling, Training
Provide capital and support to entrepreneurs through small business lending programs	Med	X	X	X	BPDC	EDA, MT Dept. of Commerce, USDA, Commercial Lenders	Implementation
Collaborate with MSU-Northern to enhance academic offerings through curriculum and technical training programs for workforce development needs	Med	X	X		MSU-Northern, Private Industry	BPDC, MT Dept. of Commerce	Technical Assistance and Planning



Goal V: Continually provide economic and community development planning services to the region

Strategies:

- Continue to support local communities in developing and updating short-term and long-term planning documents
- Encourage communities to develop strategies for resiliency planning, including cross-training methods, continuity of operations resources, and emergency preparedness plans
- Assist communities in understanding resiliency needs and resources as a result of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and assist communities in resiliency preparation for future, large-scale economic disruptions
- Support investment in downtown revitalization and blight removal through technical assistance, planning, and identifying funding opportunities

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Assist the City of Havre in establishing a Downtown Master Plan	Med	X			City of Havre	BPDC, MT Main Street Program, MTDOC	Technical Assistance and Planning
Provide rural infrastructure planning services for growth policies, CIPs, CEDS, etc.	High	X	X	X	Local Government	BPDC, CDBG, DNRC, BSTF, TSEP, USDA	Technical Assistance and Planning
Administer the Northern Montana Brownfields Assessment Program	High	X	X		BPDC	EPA, DEQ, Local Property Owners	Technical Assistance and Planning
Administer the Northern Montana Brownfields Cleanup Program	High	X	X		BPDC	EPA, DEQ, Local Property Owners, Developers	Implementation
Assist the City of Fort Benton in conducting environmental and cultural assessment at the I. G. Baker House Museum	Med	X			City of Fort Benton, FBCIA	BPDC, DNRC	Technical Assistance and Planning
Assist the City of Fort Benton in updating their Growth Policy	High	X			City of Fort Benton	BPDC, MTDOC	Technical Assistance and Planning



Goal VI: Enhance the development and delivery of the region’s natural and renewable resources, including alternative energy options

Strategies:

- Support the ongoing development, repair, and update of the St. Mary’s Diversion Dam and continue to educate the public on the importance of maintaining and revitalizing the Diversion system
- Support the development of natural and renewable resources in the region
- Encourage the exploration of opportunities for solar, wind, and electric energy generation and services at a scale that is suitable for the region
- Assist and educate municipalities, businesses, and community members on the best forms of alternative energy and opportunities to grow alternative energy operations
- Collaborate with state legislature and state departments to advocate acceptable uses of alternative energy among co-ops as well as large-scale and small-scale providers
- Assist local energy co-ops to build capacity and reduce reliance on large energy corporations

Action Item	Priority	Short Term 1-2 yrs	Mid Term 3-5 yrs	Long Term 5-10 yrs	Lead Agency	Resources/Partners	Type of Assistance
Provide technical assistance to private farms to develop utility scale wind power facilities	Low	X	X		Local Producers	BPDC, NCAT, USDA-REAP	Technical Assistance
Assist with the administrative coordination of the St. Mary Working Group and serve on the Advisory Committee	High	X	X	X	BOR, St. Mary Working Group	BPDC, DNRC, Army Corps of Engineers, State of Montana, Fed. Delegates	Technical Assistance
Provide technical assistance to area farmers in developing geothermal and natural gas resources	Low	X	X		Local Producers	BPDC, NCAT, USDA-REAP, DNRC, MTDOC	Technical Assistance

Measuring Progress





Criteria for Inclusion

The BPDC Board of Directors and staff prepare and prioritize projects to address District goals. When considering activities proposed for inclusion in the District's annual work plan, the following criteria are used for selection:

1. Is the proposal consistent with the goals of the District?
2. Does it create or sustain jobs?
3. Does it expand the District's manufacturing or value-added base?
4. Does it promote public-private partnerships that will benefit the District's residents, especially low- and moderate-income residents and those in protected groups?
5. Does it expand markets for our natural resources and agriculture products?
6. Does it eliminate barriers to economic growth?
7. Does it foster inter-governmental cooperation between Reservation and off-Reservation units of local government?
8. Does it sustain, maintain, create new, or enhance existing infrastructure to maintain economic and community growth?
9. Does it create communities that are better prepared to engage in economic development activities?

Additionally, to be considered, a member of the District must submit a written request for consideration by the Executive Director. If the item meets the District's criteria, it will be presented to the Board for final approval. Once approved, the activity is then assigned by the Executive Director to the appropriate staff member and the project is prioritized according to project timelines, individual workload, and the overall priorities of the District.

EDA INVESTMENT POLICY GUIDELINES

As an EDA-approved Economic Development District, Bear Paw utilizes the EDA's Investment Policy Guidelines in its project selection process, particularly for those projects that may qualify for EDA investment. EDA funding applications are competitively evaluated on their ability to meet or exceed the following investment policy guidelines:

Be market-based and results-driven

An investment will capitalize on the District's competitive strengths and will positively move a regional economic indicator measured on EDA's Balanced Scorecard, such as: increased number of higher-skilled, higher-wage jobs; increased tax revenue; or increased private-sector investment.

Have strong organizational leadership

An investment will have strong leadership, relevant project management experience, and a significant

commitment of human-resources.

Advance productivity, innovation, and entrepreneurship

An investment will embrace the principles of entrepreneurship, enhance regional clusters, and leverage and link technology innovators and local universities to the private sector to create the conditions for greater productivity, innovation, and job creation.

Look beyond the immediate economic horizon, anticipate economic changes, and diversify the local and regional economy

An investment will be part of an overarching, long-term comprehensive economic development strategy that enhances a region's success in achieving a rising standard of living by supporting existing industry clusters, developing emerging new clusters, or attracting new regional economic drivers.

Demonstrate a high degree of commitment

The project must exhibit high levels of local-government or non-profit matching funds and private-sector leverage; have clear and unified leadership and support by local elected officials; and present strong cooperation between the business sector, relevant regional partners, and local, state, and federal governments.



Performance Measures

Bear Paw Development Corporation manages a growing number of programs for our member entities, which typically include public sector financing. Our organizational performance is continually evaluated by a myriad of state and federal government agencies that have entrusted our District with fiduciary and performance responsibilities relative to the proper management of these programs. Evaluations include performance and financial audits, regularly scheduled reporting obligations, and frequent communication with respective agencies. Our District's effectiveness is also evaluated on an ongoing basis by our Board of Directors and the Strategy Committee through communication by staff on the progress of current projects. Project updates occur through board meetings, personal contacts, meetings of member entities, a quarterly newsletter, an annual report, and the CEDS.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENTS

- The level at which BPDC complies with all EDA Revolving Loan Fund, Planning, and Technical Assistance grant award and administrative conditions
- The number of jobs created and retained in the Bear Paw Economic Development District
- Number and types of investments undertaken

- Amount of private sector investment
- The level and frequency to which District staff interacts with communities within the region to provide assistance toward mitigating identified infrastructure deficiencies
- The level and frequency of participation by government, business, and community leaders in projects and Board and Strategy Committee meetings
- The level at which BPDC meets the criteria established by the Montana Department of Commerce's Certified Regional Development Corporation Program
- The level at which the SBDC program meets the annual counseling and training goals established jointly by the SBA, Montana Department of Commerce, and the SBDC

ANNUAL GPRA REPORT

In order to provide establishment of strategic planning and performance measurement in the federal government, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993. The purpose of the GPRA was to improve the confidence of the American people in the capability of the federal government, by systematically holding federal agencies accountable for achieving program results and improve federal pro-

gram effectiveness and public accountability by promoting new focus on results, service quality, and customer satisfaction. Since 1993, Bear Paw staff has prepared and submitted to the EDA an annual GPRA report that includes the following information:

- Number of economic development initiatives implemented during the prior period (fiscal year) that led to private investment and jobs
- Category of each project: facility construction/rehab, technical assistance, infrastructure, planning, or other
- Number of projects classified as either technology or Brownfields
- Number of investments funded by any source
- A list of the economic development initiatives/projects
- Estimated number of jobs created or retained
- Estimated amount of private sector investment generated
- Estimated amount of public sector investment

As an additional performance measurement, Bear Paw Development Corporation formed a Strategy Committee that is responsible for developing and revising the CEDS.



The Strategy Committee is comprised of representatives from local and tribal government, business, industry, finance, education, and community organizations. The Committee demonstrates a conscious effort to include a broad range of voices in the development of a sustainable economic strategy.

Each year, the Bear Paw staff surveys the Strategy Committee, asking some of the following questions:

- In general, how would you rate the state of the regional economy of the Bear Paw District?
- What do you believe are 2-3 of the best opportunities to improve the regional economy of the Bear Paw District?
- What do you believe are 2-3 of the best opportunities to improve the economy where you live and work?
- What do you consider to be the biggest threat to our region's economy?
- What are some of the challenges/obstacles that business entrepreneurs face when starting out in northern Montana?
- What can the state/local government/Bear Paw Development do to mitigate these challenges?
- Who are the people, organizations, business

entities, or units of government that are the most important to partner with to create a vibrant economy for the people and communities of northern Montana?

- Please complete the following sentence: "The regional economy of northern Montana is as good as it can be. This is because ... "
- Give us your thoughts about how Bear Paw Development can become a better organization and contribute more significantly to a stable, growing economy for our region.

The Strategy Committee meets semiannually to discuss the economic development issues in the District, and the feedback provided by the Committee informs the CEDS. In December, Bear Paw Development Corporation's Board of Directors meets to review a draft version of the CEDS update and, if appropriate, approves the document and its submission to the EDA.

This process has enabled our Board, Strategy Committee, and local partners to better understand the role Bear Paw Development plays in our region and has facilitated a better appreciation of the challenges facing the other communities in our District. Each year, the staff and board analyze those barriers to strategy implementation and retools the strategies and skills utilized based upon discovery and resource availability.

The 2022 update of Bear Paw Development Corporation's CEDS represents the renewed commitment by our staff and Board of Directors to deliver and sustain a high level of attention and service to each of our members and the residents of northern Montana. We believe this plan exemplifies smart, strategic policies that reflect the values of our residents and will strengthen our local economies and build our local capacity and resiliency.



Bear Paw Development Corporation

48 Second Avenue, Suite 202

Havre, MT 59501

www.bearpaw.org