



Map of the Montana Railroad, 1899

MEAGHER COUNTY

2015 Draft Growth Policy

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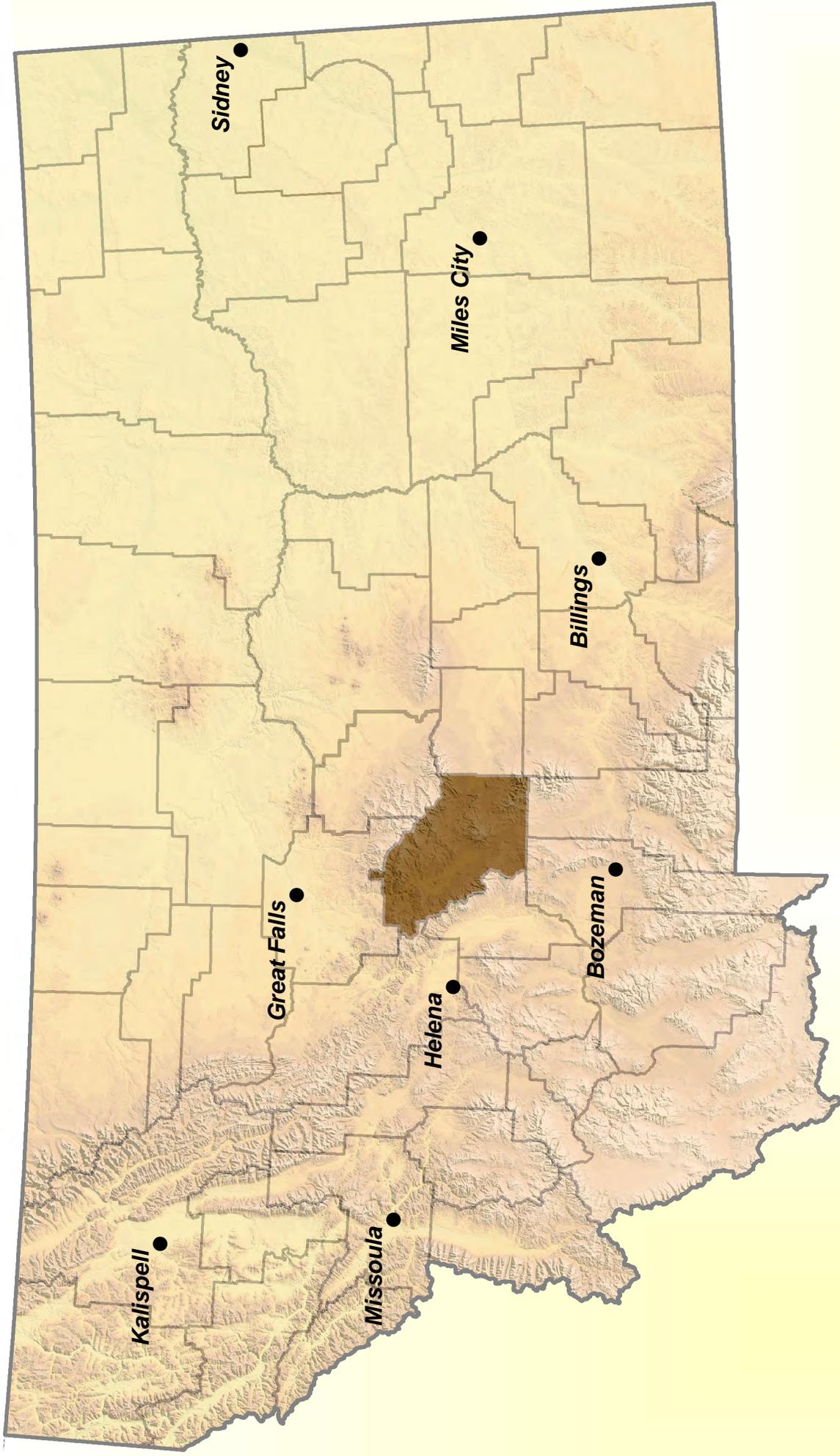
October 2015

Prepared for the Meagher County Planning Board by:



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MAP 1: MEAGHER COUNTY LOCATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Encompassing 2,395 square miles, Meagher County is a place dominated by its incredible natural resources. It boasts productive ranch and farm lands and substantial mineral and timber wealth. It also contains nearly 600,000 acres of public land and natural amenities, which support a healthy tourism sector.



The population of the County has not returned to the numbers seen in earlier decades, but has stabilized around the 1,900 figure and is even projected to grow slightly by the year 2020. Residents are aging and there has been a significant loss of working age people.

Like its people, the economy of the County has changed in the last 15 years, moving from one largely dependent upon natural resources such as the timber and ranching, to one where the service sector is the most important, which includes jobs in real estate, medical services, transportation and hospitality. All of this being said the basis of the County's economy could quickly change. The potential exists for several significant natural resource projects, including a copper mine and a pumped hydro storage facility. The mine alone could provide a significant economic boost and focus the County's economy back to natural resources.



It is with these issues in mind that the County's residents completed this update of the 2003 Growth Policy. The update was created with the philosophy of ensuring the property rights of residents, maintaining their rural character and lifestyle, and encouraging economic development.

The document is also meant to provide the County with the tools to address new growth and to responsibly use tax dollars for operation and maintenance of infrastructure.

This update is based upon five broad goals that the County will pursue:

- Strengthen and diversify the economy.
- Provide adequate public services and infrastructure.
- Provide a healthy and welcoming environment.
- Provide essential emergency services.
- Ensure that new housing is efficiently and safely developed.



Achieving these goals will require hard work and patience. Nonetheless there are opportunities and issues that the residents of the County can work toward addressing.

With regards to improving our economy, it will be essential to simultaneously maintain our existing industries, such as agriculture and tourism, while attracting dynamic, community

minded people interested in making the County their home and place of business. Part of that approach is to take advantage of the assets that we have such as our excellent broadband internet access and the responsible development of our abundant natural resources.

Strengthening our economy and attracting new people, families and businesses demands a solid foundation of infrastructure and community and emergency services. Therefore we must provide efficient and cost effective services such as roads, medical care, schools, law enforcement and fire protection.



With the potential for resource development on our horizon, we must also address our housing stock. If projects such as the copper mine and the pumped hydro electric generation facility become a reality, the accompanying work forces will likely occupy our limited and aging housing supply. In addition, an increase in population related to these projects will likely result in new residential developments in the County and the City. Also, with the end of the recession and resulting economic growth in communities such as Bozeman, Meagher County may experience a “housing spill-over” effect with people looking for more affordable housing within commuting distance of places

like Bozeman and Livingston. With this in mind, we must work to address issues related to our housing market and prepare for potential residential subdivisions and the need for work force housing. Ultimately, the residents of the County welcome new economic opportunities and growth for our communities, but they want to ensure that it occurs in a manner that maintains their identity and quality of life.



It must be noted, that the Growth Policy provides the legal foundation by which the County implements the goals identified. Therefore, it is important that the major decisions on land use in the County should be based upon the guidance found in this document. Also, the document should not be viewed in a vacuum. Implementing the goals and objectives will require cooperation between the County and the City of White Sulphur Springs and state and federal agencies.



Finally, the Growth Policy and the associated implementation steps such as capital improvement plans and subdivision regulations are not static documents but rather should be viewed as flexible and living documents. Therefore, it is critical to revisit and update this document periodically to ensure that changing needs and planning priorities within the County are properly addressed.

This document contains six sections that provide the rationale and foundation for

achieving the goals mentioned above. Those sections include:

- **Goals and Objectives:** Taking advantage of opportunities and addressing issues does not happen by chance. It requires that people be willing to set practical and achievable goals. This section identifies the goals and objectives set by the County residents.
- **Introduction:** A description of the County, its location, features and history.
- **Population Characteristics:** A description of the County's current and future population and a vision to attract and welcome new residents.
- **Economy:** A description of the County's current and future economic situation and a vision for capitalizing on new economic opportunities.
- **Housing:** A description of the current housing stock in the County.
- **Local Services and Public Facilities:** A description of the services the County provides and the infrastructure it maintains.

- Land Use: A description of current and future land use in the County and a vision for how and where new residential development will take place.
- Public Engagement: This section describes the process used to engage County residents in order to obtain their opinions on the issues the Growth Policy should address.
- Implementation Steps: A description of the actual steps the County may take to achieve the Goals and Objectives are described in detail.

Ultimately the Growth Policy is meant to help the residents of the County to anticipate potential changes and to be prepared to take the steps necessary to ensure that those changes result in long-term benefits for the County.



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following pages discuss the goals, objective and specific steps that the County can take to address the opportunities and needs identified in the Growth Policy.

ECONOMY

A successful community provides its residents with the opportunities to prosper. Therefore we will strengthen and diversify our economy.

Goals	Objectives
Maintain and improve agricultural operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Help producers use the most cost effective and efficient management practices. b. Increase consumption of local agricultural produce. c. Create opportunities for value added agricultural products.
Maintain and expand the basic industry sectors (manufacturing, processing, tourism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop the capacity to effectively assist in expanding or developing local businesses and recruiting outside firms or individuals.
Maintain and expand the Service Sector (i.e. retail sales, medical)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assess public and private sector services that are provided to residents to help retain existing services/businesses and identify new business opportunities.
Promote the County as a <i>Live, Work, Play Community</i> to new residents and potential employers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Market the existing high speed internet to home based professionals and others. b. Assess public and private sector services that are provided to residents to help retain existing services/businesses and identify new business opportunities.
Create an Economic Development Council to foster and stimulate business development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Provide a local input and ideas on economic development.
Consider developing a targeted economic development district (TEDD).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. An Economic Development Council could facilitate discussions with residents about the benefits of a TEDD.
Consider the adoption of a local resort sales tax.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. An Economic Development Council could facilitate discussions with residents about the potential benefits of a resort tax.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The success of our communities depends upon sound infrastructure ranging from roads and bridges to housing and telecommunications. Therefore, we will provide essential infrastructure in an efficient and economical manner.

Goals	Objectives
Ensure that expenditures on public facilities are efficient and cost-effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the infrastructure that is essential for the use of County residents. b. Regularly maintain, improve or replace County roads and bridges. c. Do not accept maintenance or replacement responsibility for new subdivision roads or bridges.
Adequately maintain County roads and bridges essential for the safe and efficient use of County residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the roads and bridges for maintenance and replacement to ensure that they facilitate safe and efficient travel. b. Examine the potential for a fuel service surcharge to help fund road and bridge maintenance.
Ensure that expenditures on roads used to access State and Federal lands are efficient and cost-effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Develop a partnership with State and Federal agencies to help facilitate the funding of maintenance of roads used to access public lands.
Adequately maintain buildings and facilities such as the solid waste transfer station to efficiently provide County services and to minimize operational costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the buildings and facilities in need of maintenance and/or replacement.
Achieve efficiencies in the providing infrastructure by coordination with the City of White Sulphur Springs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encourage cooperation and communication between the County Commission and City Council. b. Coordinate infrastructure maintenance and replacement with the City. c. Ensure that the City plans for future infrastructure needs.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

Quality of life in our communities is dependent upon many things, but most particularly the provision public services, including education, healthcare, recreation and social services, therefore the County will help to encourage adequate public service.

Goals	Objectives
Support the long-term and cost effective operation of the hospital.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintain Mountain View Medical Center’s designation as a Critical Access Hospital. b. Retain and attract high quality medical staff. c. Maintain state of the art medical equipment.
Ensure excellent continuum of care services for the County’s senior populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Maintain the operation of the Senior Center facilities. b. Facilitate the maintenance and/or creation of adequate senior housing, including independent living and assisted living facilities.
Maintain and improve the library facilities in White Sulphur Springs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support the construction of a new facility. b. Ensure a new facility is cost effective from an operations and maintenance standpoint.
Support high quality elementary and high school education and associated facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Support the construction of modern elementary and high school facilities. b. Retain and attract high quality teaching staff. c. Promote the creation of a STEM curriculum for students, skills that students learn by studying science, technology, engineering, and math.
Provide and/or support excellent park and recreational facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify funding mechanisms to help develop and maintain parks and recreational facilities. b. Coordinate with MT FWP and the USFS to ensure good recreational facilities on public lands in the County.
Support the maintenance and operation of the County’s museums.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assist museums in identifying funding sources.

EMERGENCY SERVICES

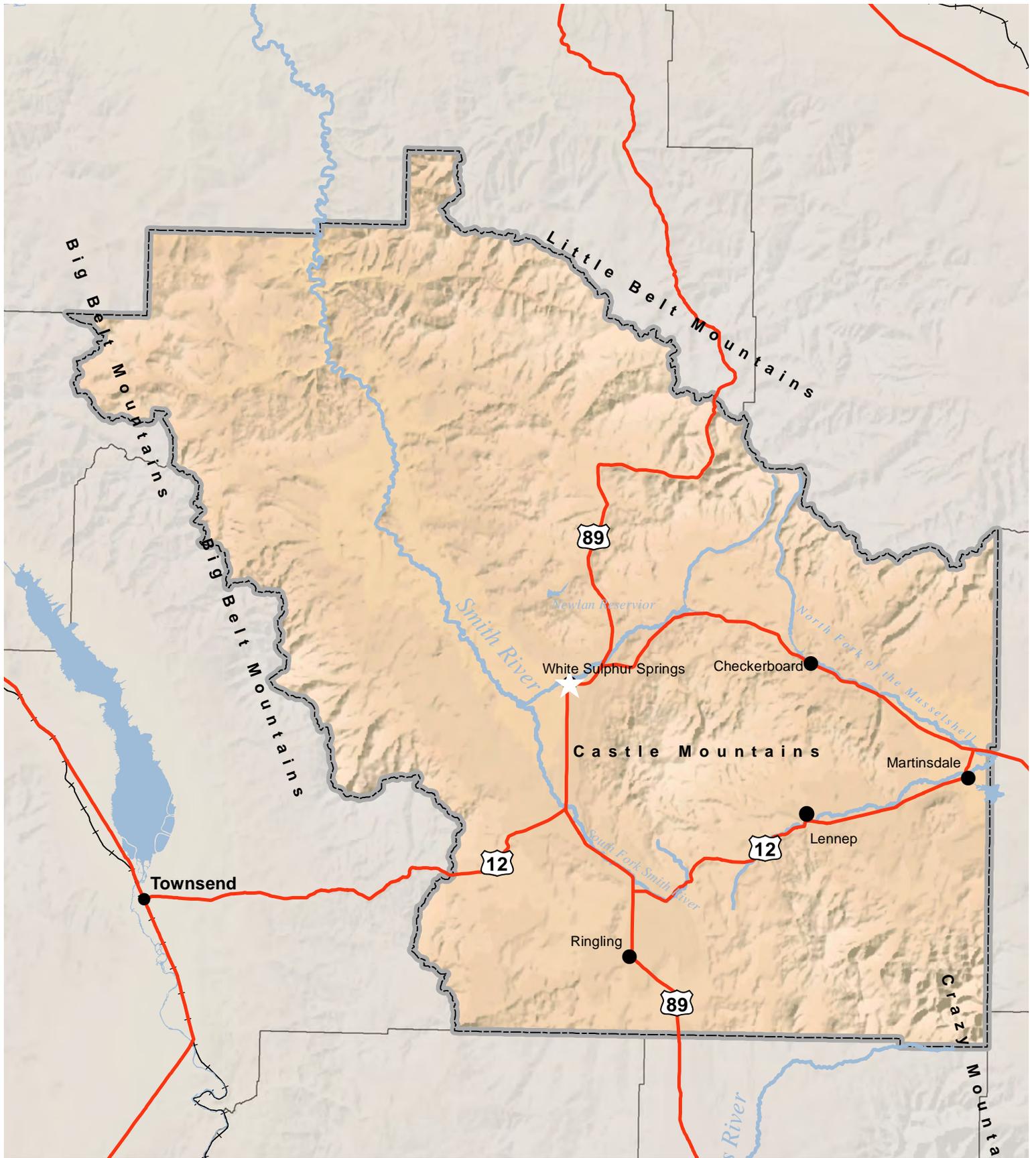
Public safety services are essential to protect the health and wellbeing of our residents and visitors. Therefore, we will provide those services in a safe, effective and economical manner.

Goals	Objectives
Ensure that the Sheriff’s Department can efficiently and effectively serve County residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the facilities and equipment that are essential for law enforcement within the County. b. Identify and prioritize the facilities in need of maintenance and/or replacement. c. Provide necessary training and equipment.
Ensure that local fire protection agencies can efficiently and effectively serve County residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the facilities and equipment that are essential for fire protection within the County. b. Identify and prioritize the facilities in need of maintenance and/or replacement. c. Provide necessary training and equipment.
Ensure that ambulance services can efficiently and effectively serve County residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the facilities and equipment that are essential for ambulance services within the County. b. Identify and prioritize the facilities in need of maintenance and/or replacement. c. Provide necessary training and equipment.
Ensure that the Search and Rescue organization can efficiently and effectively serve County residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify and prioritize the facilities and equipment that are essential for search and rescue within the County. b. Identify and prioritize the facilities in need of maintenance and/or replacement. c. Provide necessary training and equipment.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

To prosper, we must grow and provide new housing, but that growth should occur in a safe, logical and cost effective manner. Growth must not burden the taxpayer and it should become an asset to the County.

Goals	Objectives
Protect agricultural operations from the impacts of residential development	a. Notify rural homeowners of the presence and operation of agricultural uses.
Residential development should be encouraged to locate near or in existing communities.	a. New subdivisions should be accessed via public right of ways and public roads.
Residential development should be designed to protect public health and safety and to provide necessary services.	a. New residential development should be provided with infrastructure such as wastewater treatment, drinking water, on-site roads, utilities and fire protection water supplies.
Residential development should be located where they can be safely and efficiently provided with emergency services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Residential development should be located near existing communities. b. Residential development should be accessed via public right of ways and roads. c. Roads accessing new development should be built to County Subdivision standards. d. Fire protection water supplies should be provided to new developments.
Wildfire hazards for residential development located in the Wildland Urban Interface or near hazardous wildland fuels shall be mitigated.	a. Firewise hazardous fuels mitigation principles to be used to mitigate the threat of wildland fire to values at risk (structures).
Protect agricultural operations from the impacts of residential development	a. Notify rural homeowners of the presence and operation of agricultural uses.
Encourage coordination between County and Federal agencies in land use planning in the Wildland Urban Interface and for residential developments adjacent to federal land.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Achieving land use goals of the growth policy. b. Ensure use of public resources to mitigate impacts of wildfire.
Encourage the development of safe and affordable housing for all residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Understand the housing market in the County. b. Develop strategies to rehabilitate or demolish unsound or poor housing. c. Develop strategies to promote the construction of new housing.
Encourage coordination between the County and the City in land use planning and infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Achieving land use goals of growth policy. b. Efficient use of public resources. c. Providing predictability for property owners and land developers.



**MAP 2:
MEAGHER
COUNTY
ATTRIBUTES**

INTRODUCTION

Location and Size

Meagher County is located in central Montana and comprises 2,395 square miles, or 1,458,335 acres of land, slightly larger than the state of Delaware. Coupled with a population of approximately 1,909, this equates to a population density of about 1.25 persons per square mile of land.



Geography

The geography of the County is a mixture of mountains and valleys. Portions of four major mountain ranges are located within the County, including the Big Belts, Castles, Crazyes and the Little Belts. Elevations in the County range from 9,700 feet at the top of Mount Edith in the Big Belts to 4,000 feet where the Smith River leaves the County. These mountain ranges form the headwaters for iconic rivers such as the Musselshell, Shields and Smith. The Smith is the predominant river, flowing for nearly forty miles north through the County until it enters Cascade County and then into the Missouri River. The Musselshell flows easterly then north into the Missouri, while the Shields flows southerly into the Yellowstone River.



There are also three substantial reservoirs located within the County, including Lake Sutherland, Martinsdale Reservoir and Newlan Creek Reservoir.

Climate

Meagher County has the semi-arid, continental climate that is common in Central Montana. The County experiences cold winters and warm summers. The City of White Sulphur Springs, the

County seat, has an average annual high temperature of 55 degrees F and an average annual low temperature of 29 degrees F. High temperatures in the summer months range into the 90s and low temperatures in the winter months can dip into the negative digits.

Precipitation in the County varies widely in distribution, intensity and occurrence with the average annual precipitation in White Sulphur Springs approximately 13 inches per year and 13.5 inches in Martinsdale.



Communities

The City of White Sulphur Springs is the County’s primary population center and the only incorporated community located with the County. In 2015, it had a population of 948 persons. There are also three unincorporated communities located in the County: Lenep, Martinsdale (65 people) and Ringling.

Private and Public Lands

Meagher County contains 1,458,335 acres of land. Of that, 880,611 acres are privately owned and 577,725 are publically owned. Ownership of public lands is held by three entities, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Forest Service and the State of Montana.



Land Ownership in the County (Acres)		
Private Ownership	880,611	60.4%
United States Forest Service	474,809	32.6%
Bureau of Land Management	8,472	0.6%
State of Montana-Trust Lands	89,964	6.1%
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks	4,480	0.3%

Table 1: Land Ownership in Meagher County

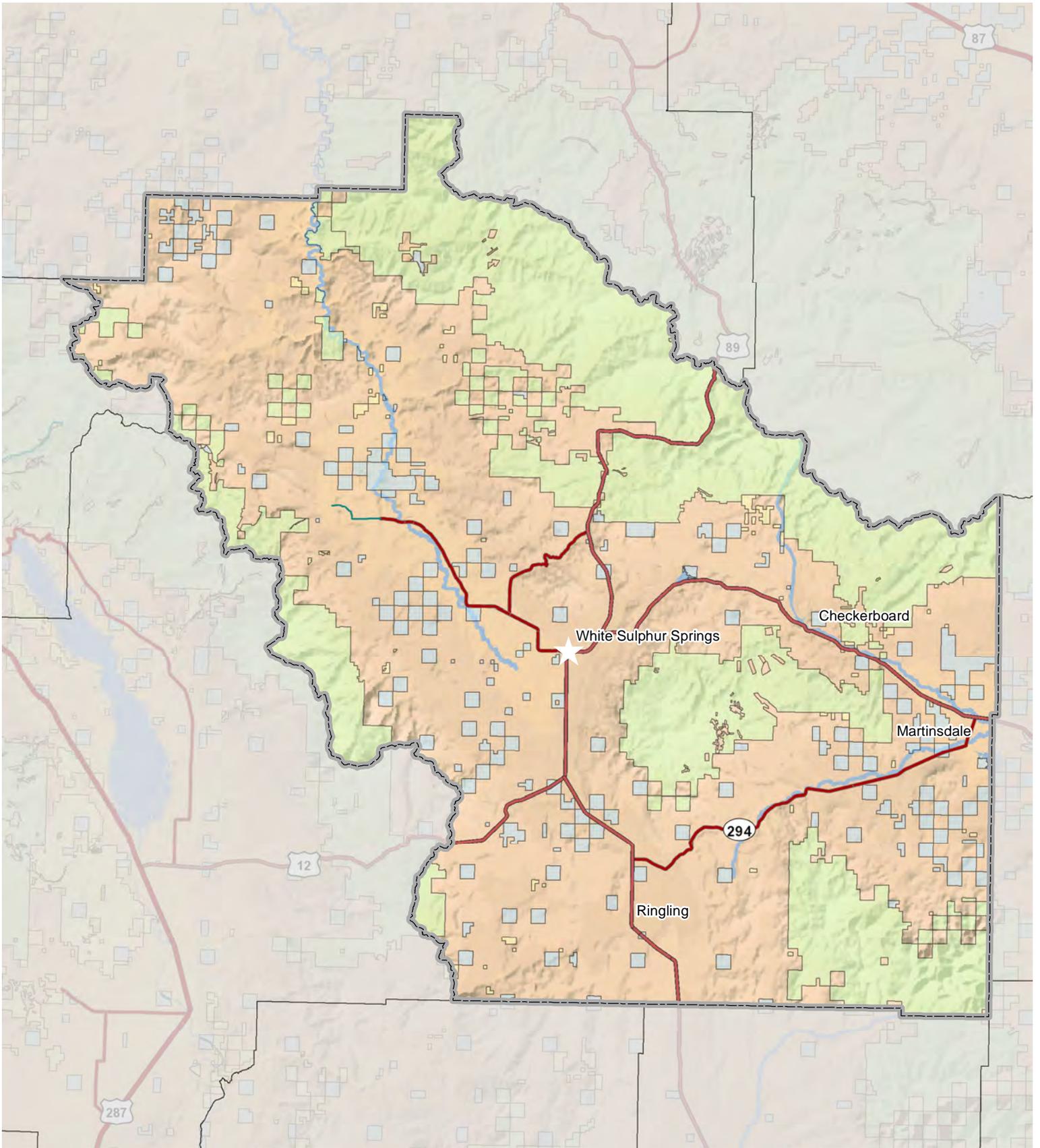
Vegetation

The predominant vegetation type in the County is grassland, which covers approximately 714,584 acres and accounts for 49 percent of the total land cover by area. Mixed cropland comprises 116,667 acres of land, including irrigated and dry land crops. Forests cover 452,084 acres of land and shrubland (sagebrush-grasses) cover 145,834 acres.

History

The hot springs of the Smith River Valley were first used by Native Americans for medicinal purposes. Numerous tribes used the hot springs and despite enmity between them, over time they negotiated a truce amongst themselves in which the Valley surrounding the hot springs was a place of peace where no armed conflict was tolerated.





- Private Lands
- United States Forest Service
- State of Montana
- Bureau of Land Management



**MAP 3:
MEAGHER
COUNTY
LAND
OWNERSHIP**

Meagher County was created in 1867 as part of the original Montana Territory. It was named after the colorful Civil War general Thomas Francis Meagher, who was the acting governor of Montana from 1865 to 1867. The original County comprised 20,000 square miles, until it was reduced in size to 2,395 square miles with the creation of neighboring counties.

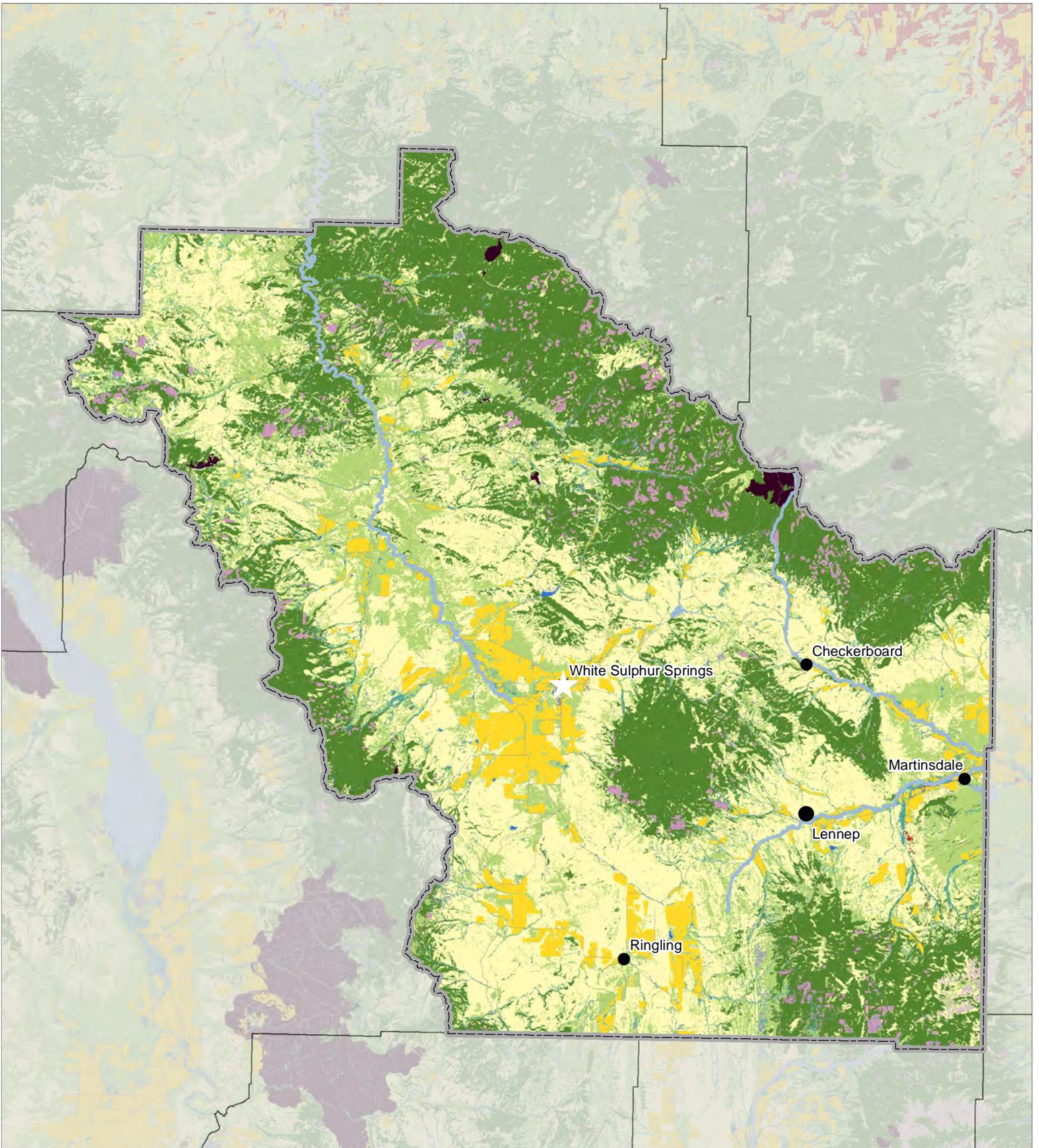
The County has seen dramatic swings in its economic fortunes. Early in its history there were gold rushes in the Big Belt Mountains and copper, lead and silver discoveries in the Castle and Little Belt Mountains. The timber industry also played a major role in the economy of the County until the late 1990's when there was a nation-wide decline in timber prices and harvests.



A silver mining boom in the Castle Mountains precipitated the development of the Jawbone Railroad which was built from Lombard up to Sixteen Mile Creek with plans to provide service to the boom in the Castles. The railroad went bankrupt during the one of the “silver crashes” at the turn of the 20th century. Ultimately an east-west section of the Jawbone became the Milwaukee Railroad.

Ringling, MT was named after John Ringling—one of the 7 Ringling brothers from the world renowned Ringling Brothers Circus. John was the president of the White Sulphur Springs and Yellowstone Park Railway (WSYP). The WSYP was constructed in 1910 and ran 22.8 miles between Ringling and White Sulphur Springs. The railroad played a large part in bringing tourism to Meagher County, due to the fact that the transcontinental railway main line of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (aka the Milwaukee Road) had a station stop in Ringling. The Ringling station acted as a link between the Milwaukee Road and the WSYP and allowed tourists from around the country to visit White Sulphur Springs.

John Ringling purchased a summer home and the hot springs in White Sulphur Springs. He had dreams of building a hotel resort on the hot springs that would attract more tourists and increase his railroad's profits. However, with the Great Depression John Ringling was unable fund his dream hotel. In 1980, more than 40 years after Ringling's death, both the Milwaukee Road and the WSYP were abandoned.



-  Cultivated Crop Land
-  Sagebrush Steppe
-  Grasslands
-  Forest
-  Regenerating Forest



**MAP 4:
MEAGHER
COUNTY
LAND COVER**

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS



Current estimates indicate that the County’s population is in the neighborhood of 1,909 persons and projections by the Census Bureau show that by 2020 there could be a modest increase up to 1,956 persons.

Like many rural counties in Montana, the County is aging quickly. The median age of the County in 2015 was approximately 52, which was a significant increase from the median age of 42.8 in 2000. The aging of the population is likely to continue and

could have impacts upon the County’s ability to provide services such as healthcare.

The County’s prime working-age population (ages 35-44) accounted for only 10.4 percent of the total population in 2012. The gap in middle-aged adults was contrasted by the large proportion of school age children living in the County, which make up almost 24 percent of the population.

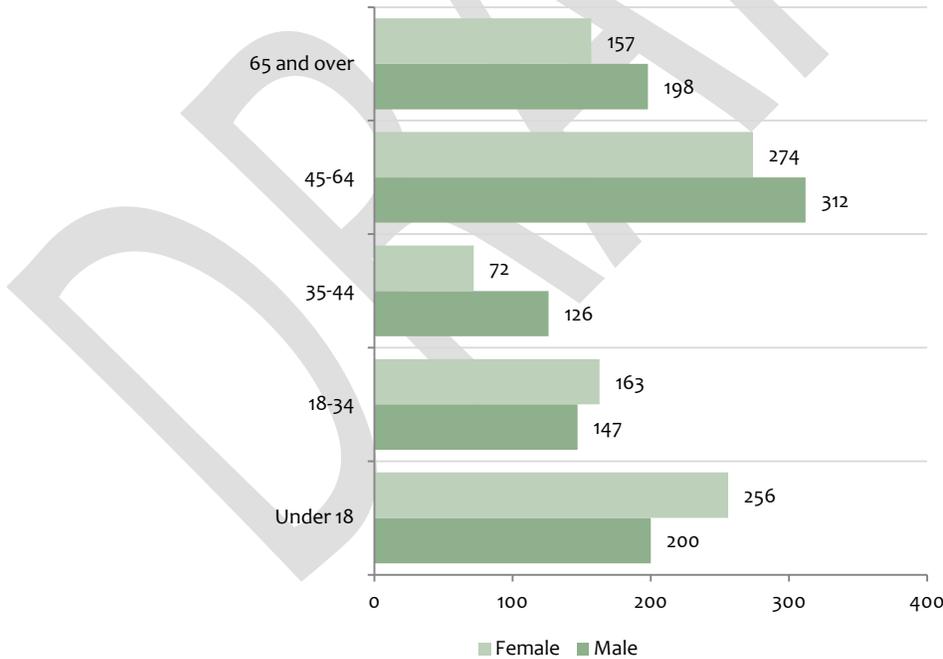


Figure 1: Age Breakout by for Meagher County, 2012
 (Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2012 Washington, D.C.,
 as reported in Headwaters Economics’ Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps))

In 2015, the percentage of the County’s population that was in the 35-44 age bracket had dropped to approximately 8.3 percent since 2000. The decline in this age bracket seems to indicate that a large proportion of middle-aged working adults have left the County to work and live elsewhere.

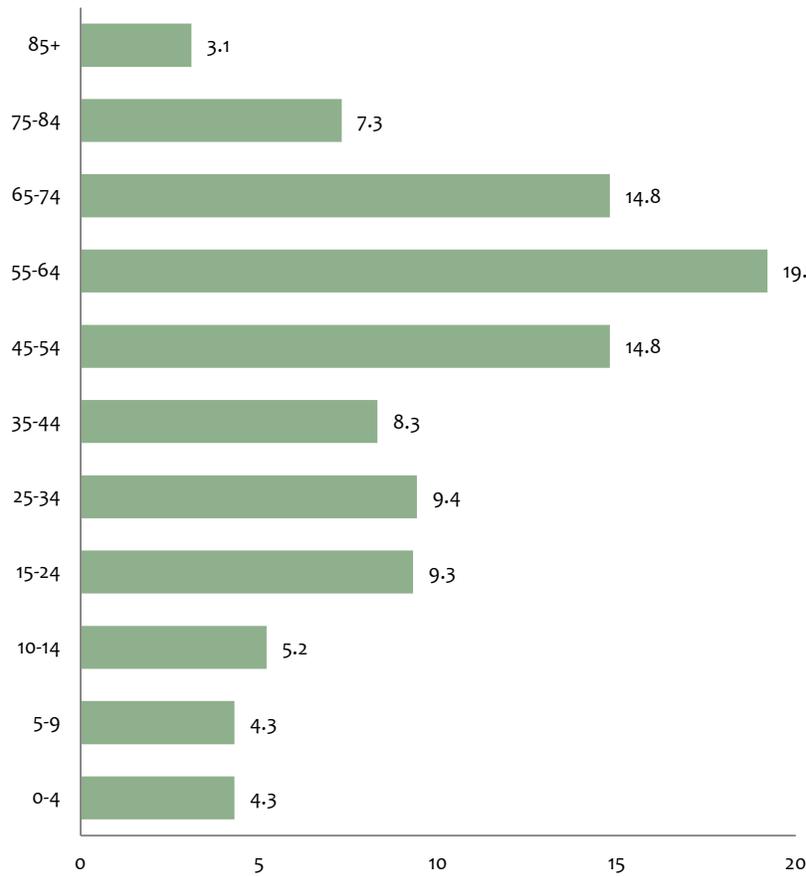


Figure 2: Age Breakout by Percentage for Meagher County, 2015
(ESRI, 2015)

With these statistics in mind, the County needs to focus on attracting prime-working age people back to the area by encouraging the development of new businesses and industry, which could normalize the County’s demographics and lower the median age. Strategies could include marketing and/or incentivizing the re-location of specialty and niche industries and home based professionals to the County.

Resource Development and Population Growth

Census Bureau estimates for population growth in the County do not take into account the potential influx of people that could accompany the development of several proposed resource oriented projects, including a proposed copper mine located north of White



Sulphur Springs and pumped hydro electric generation facility just southwest of Martinsdale.

If the copper mine is approved and construction begins, estimates indicate that upwards of 261 workers could be expected to move to the County during the construction phase of the project. Of these workers, one projection indicates that up to 5 percent of the

workers would bring their families with them, thus increasing the number of people moving into the County by 296 during the construction phase of the project.

When and if the mine is fully operational, some estimates anticipate up to 100 permanent workers will reside in the County. The Census Bureau data shows that the average American household had 2.54 persons in 2014. When this average household is considered in combination with a 100 person work force for the mine, the total population that might move into the County on a permanent basis for the operation of the mine could be up to 254 persons.



The pumped hydro project would require a temporary construction workforce of approximately 350 people and a permanent work force of 20-24 people. Again, when the average household size is considered in combination with a 20 person permanent work force for the hydro project, the total population that might move into the County for the operation of this project could be up to 50 persons.

An increase in the permanent population of this magnitude will have significant impacts upon the housing market, infrastructure and the provision of local services in the County, but it will also provide a wealth of new economic opportunities if the growth is properly managed.

ECONOMY

Meagher County’s economy like many counties in the western United States is seeing a transition from one that was once solely dominated by goods-producing industries (i.e. ranching, farming, timber) to one that is now balanced between agriculture and services (i.e. retail trade, transportation, hospitality etc).



The continued importance of agriculture to the County’s economy is reflected in the market value of products (crops and livestock) sold, which was \$39 million in 2012. \$29.5 million of which was livestock sales and \$9.48 million was crop sales. The average sale per ranch or farm in the County was \$286,810.

Nonetheless, non-service related industries such as ranching and timber have seen a decline in earnings from \$20.4 million to \$9.9 million between 1970 and 2001. During the same time period, earnings from services related industries grew from \$5.2 million to \$11.6 million, a 124 percent increase. Earnings from government have remained relatively stable from 1970 to 2000, with only a 21 percent increase from \$5.6 million to \$6.8 million.

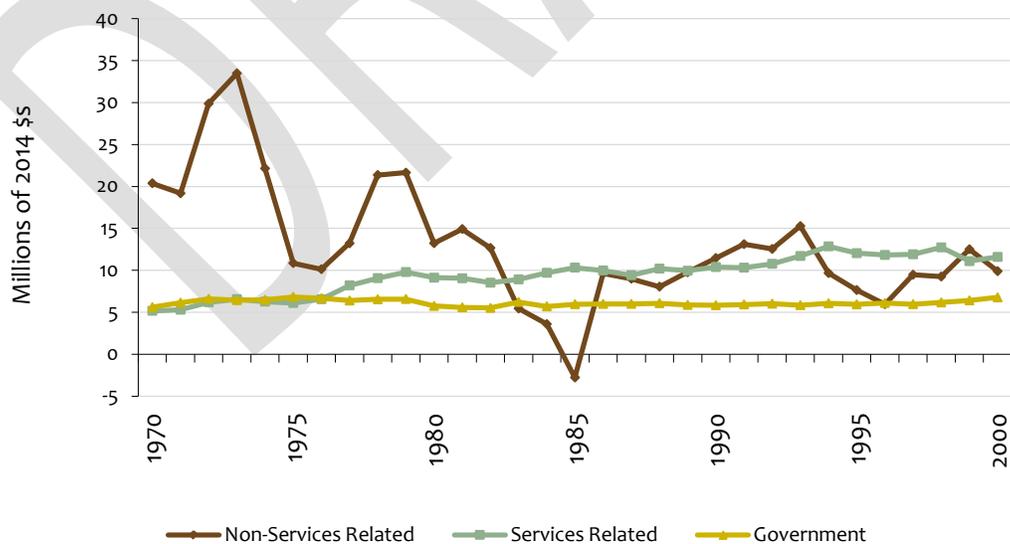


Figure 3: Industry Earnings in Meagher County 1970-2000

U.S. Department of Labor. 2013. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics’ Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps).

Since 2001, the service-based economy has continued to grow. From 2001 to 2013, earnings in non-service related industries continued to decline from \$7.3 million to \$3.4 million, a 51 percent decline in 13 years. By contrast service related industries, grew from \$4.7 million to \$6.2 million, a 32 percent increase.

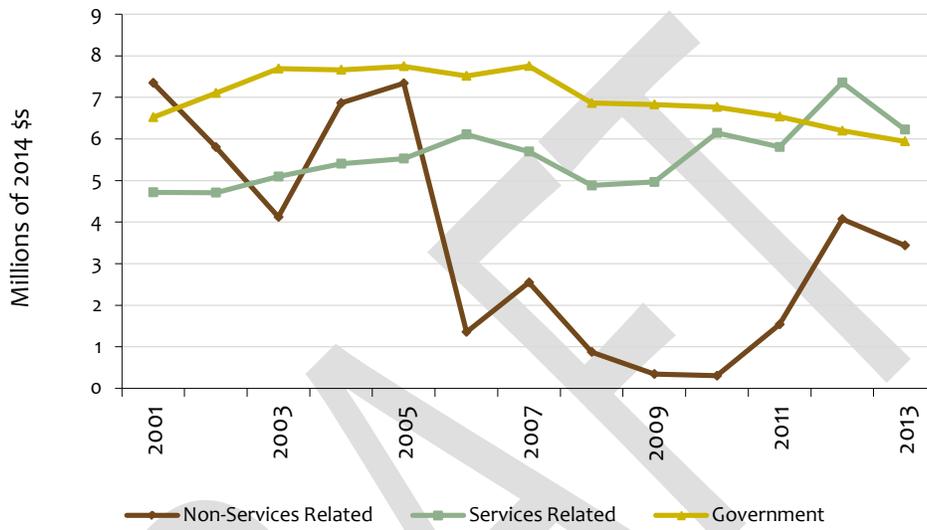


Figure 4: Industry Earnings in Meagher County 2001-2013

U.S. Department of Labor. 2013. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps).

It must be noted that income and earnings data for Meagher County does not include corporate earnings. Also because the population size in the County is so small, the Census Bureau must avoid disclosing data where the data furnished by any particular business or individual can be easily identified due to the small sample size. This is important to understand as most ranching operations are doing business as corporations and the number of people working in a particular industry such as finance and real estate in the County are very limited.



The change in the number of jobs in the both the non-service and service industry correlates with this continued transition from a resource based economy. In 2001, there were approximately 227 non-service jobs in the County, primarily associated with ranching and farming, by 2013 this number was down to 182 jobs. This decline

in ranch and farm employment may be partially attributable to the consolidation of operations and modernization of the equipment such as a move from flood irrigation to sprinkler pivots and the use of ATV's to move carry out maintenance and move cattle.

The decline in non-service jobs is contrasted by the service industry which grew from 322 jobs to 350. This reflects national and state-wide trends hence the service industry will likely remain an important component of the County's economy for years to come.

Earnings and Personal Income

When trying to understand the economy it is important to understand how people's income and earnings have changed over time. The estimated median income in Meagher County in 2010 was \$29,026 and in 2015 was \$32,129. The County has seen a 9.6 percent increase in 5 years. Median income is calculated by dividing the income distribution of the County into two equal groups. Half of the population has an income above the median, and half have an income below it.

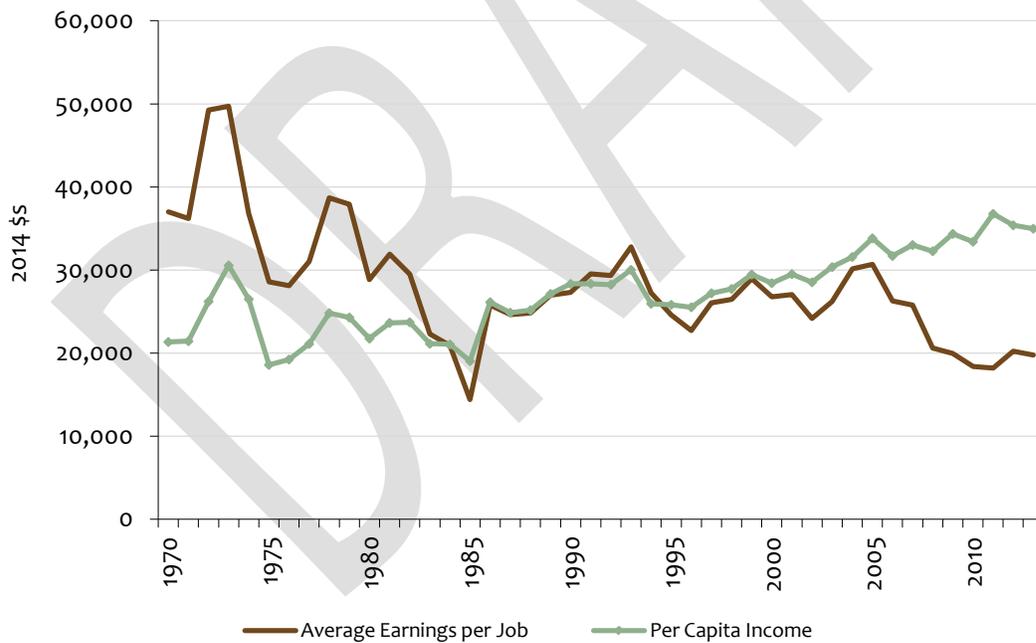


Figure 5: Average Earnings per Job & Per Capita Income, Meagher County, MT
 (U.S. Department of Labor. 2014. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps))

The average earnings per job is a measure of the compensation of the average job, while per capita income is a measure of income per person from both labor and non-labor sources.

Non-labor sources include dividends, interest, rent and transfer payments such as Social Security, Medicare and Food Stamps etc. From 1970 to 2013, the average earnings per job in the County shrank from \$36,992 to \$19,783, a 47 percent decrease. This is contrasted by per capita income which grew from \$21,339 in 1970 to \$34,975 in 2013, a 64 percent increase.



There are a number of reasons why average earnings per job may have declined in the County. These include: 1) a rise in low-wage service industry jobs, such as tourism-related sectors; 2) a decline of high-wage industries, such as logging; 3) the aging of residents who transition from labor income to social security and other income when they retire; and 4) the in-migration of semi-retired people who work part-time and/or seasonally.

The County's economic situation could dramatically change if the proposed copper mine and pumped hydro project occur. They could dramatically reverse the economic trend toward a

service-based economy to one that is again dominated by natural resource production. Regardless of what occurs with the mine or pumped hydro projects, the service-based economy will continue to play an important role in the economic health of the County.



Opportunities

Beyond the potential for the copper mine and pumped hydro project, County residents have a number of opportunities that they can take advantage of to enhance the economy of the area. First, there has been a departure of businesses important to the health and well-being of the community. Examples include the loss of both the dentist office and chiropractor. In order to address the loss of businesses, residents should assess all of the services provided by the public, private and non-profit sectors in order to understand what the community's service needs are and then to develop strategies to help retain existing services/businesses and identify opportunities to attract new or replacement businesses.

Meagher County provides its residents with a high quality, rural lifestyle. Couple this with an incredible wealth of natural and recreational amenities and infrastructure such as excellent broad band internet service; the potential exists to attract new residents and businesses to

the County with the concept that Meagher County is a wonderful place to *Live, Work and Play*. Today telecommuting professionals live in all corners of the United States and Meagher County should not be an exception. Hence, the County should explore the options available to effectively market the its social, natural and technological assets to the professionals and businesses that are looking for a place like Meagher County to live, work and play.



The County should also consider creating a business assistance program. The program would foster the expansion and retention of local businesses, promote local business start-ups, and facilitate relocation of out-of-county firms to Meagher County. The program would develop local capacity and capability in order to provide technical assistance to prospective firms, facilitate grants and loans and other funding from state and federal sources. The program could also identify available properties for lease or sale, costs/prices, availability of electrical power, water, sewer, road access, parking, etc. and assist with writing business plans, marketing analyses, etc.

Natural Resources

Natural resources play an important role in the life of Meagher County residents. Every sector of the economy is driven in one way or another by the resources that are located within the County. This includes the grasslands and soils that support ranching and farming, the public lands and waters that support tourism and recreation, the service sector that provides food, lodging, entertainment and medical care to residents and tourists, or the mineral and energy resources that hold significant economic potential.

Agriculture



Agriculture is one of the primary industries in the County, with total sales of \$39 million in 2012 up from \$25.3 million dollars in 2007. In 2012, there were approximately 136 ranches and farms in the County, with an average size of an operation being 5,973 acres. In 2007, those operations had an average value of \$6.8 million dollars and an average income of \$36,380.

The production of cattle is by far the largest sector of the agricultural industry in the County, with over 51,000 head in 2012. Hay is the most important crop in the County and accounts for 41,000 acres with a production of 77,000 tons in 2012. Barley is the most important cultivated crop, with 10,000 acres planted and production of 588,000 bushels. Wheat is the next crop in importance, with over 4,700 acres planted in spring wheat and a production of 157,000 bushels in 2012. Not surprisingly, agriculture is the largest employer in the County, accounting for 12.9 percent or 182 jobs in 2013.



People in the County have expressed a desire to protect agricultural operations from the impacts associated with new residential development. Often, new home owners living in close proximity to agriculture do not understand or appreciate the operations that take place on ranches and farms. They can become upset by daily tasks such as moving livestock on roads, spraying noxious weeds, spraying fertilizer and summer haying and fall harvesting in the evenings. While no mechanism is fool-proof, the County may consider a system to

notify people constructing new homes in the County that if they chose to live in an agricultural area, that they may experience the impacts from those operations. This notice could be provided upon the issuance of a septic permit by the County Sanitarian for the construction of a new home.

Hydro-Electric Generation



Although energy production has not been a major part of the economy in the County, a private entity is proposing a pumped storage hydro project at Gordon Butte, three miles west of Martinsdale. The project would use the topography of Gordon Butte

to create a closed-loop pumped storage hydro facility. This facility will help balance the transmission of electricity from generating sources, such as the wind farm located at Judith Gap, to the ultimate delivery to consumers

The “Gordon Butte Hydro Pumped Storage Facility” will consist of upper and lower closed-loop reservoirs connected by an underground concrete and steel-lined hydraulic shaft. The pumped storage hydro project will be an off-stream facility, constructed out of any existing watersheds thereby minimizing impacts to the local watersheds and riparian ecosystems. Each reservoir will be approximately 4,000 feet long and 1,000 feet wide with depths of 50 to 75 feet. As currently designed, an underground powerhouse with four turbine-generators would be located at the bottom reservoir. These generators would provide an installed capacity of 400 megawatts, allowing for an estimated annual energy generation of 1300 gigawatt hours. The project received a preliminary permit from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to begin a multi-year licensing process. The pumped hydro project if undertaken could require a temporary construction workforce of 350 people and ultimately a permanent work force of 20-24 people.

Mining

In the late 1980’s exploratory drilling discovered large deposits of copper ore at the head of Sheep Creek in the Little Belt Mountains, approximately 17 miles north of White Sulphur Springs. By 2013, a private corporation started the permitting process to develop and operate an underground mine in the area to remove the ore. If permitted by the State of Montana, the mine could be under construction by approximately 2018 and is estimated to



have an operational life of 11 to 14 years. The impact of such a mine upon the County would be tremendous, in terms of economics, demographic changes and the effects upon local services and infrastructure.

As mentioned in the Population section, the mine would create a significant in-migration of construction workers during the construction phase, as well as during the operational phase of the mine. If the mine is permitted and becomes a reality, the question becomes can the County take advantage of the economic benefits of the project, while preserving resident's quality of life and maintaining adequate services and infrastructure.

Other opportunities exist for mineral development in the County, particularly the development of iron deposits. North of White Sulphur Springs in the Sheep Creek area there are limonite-hematite deposits and south of the City in the Castle Mountains there are magnetite deposits, with one deposit located up Willow Creek containing an estimated 187,000 tons of ore.

Oil & Gas

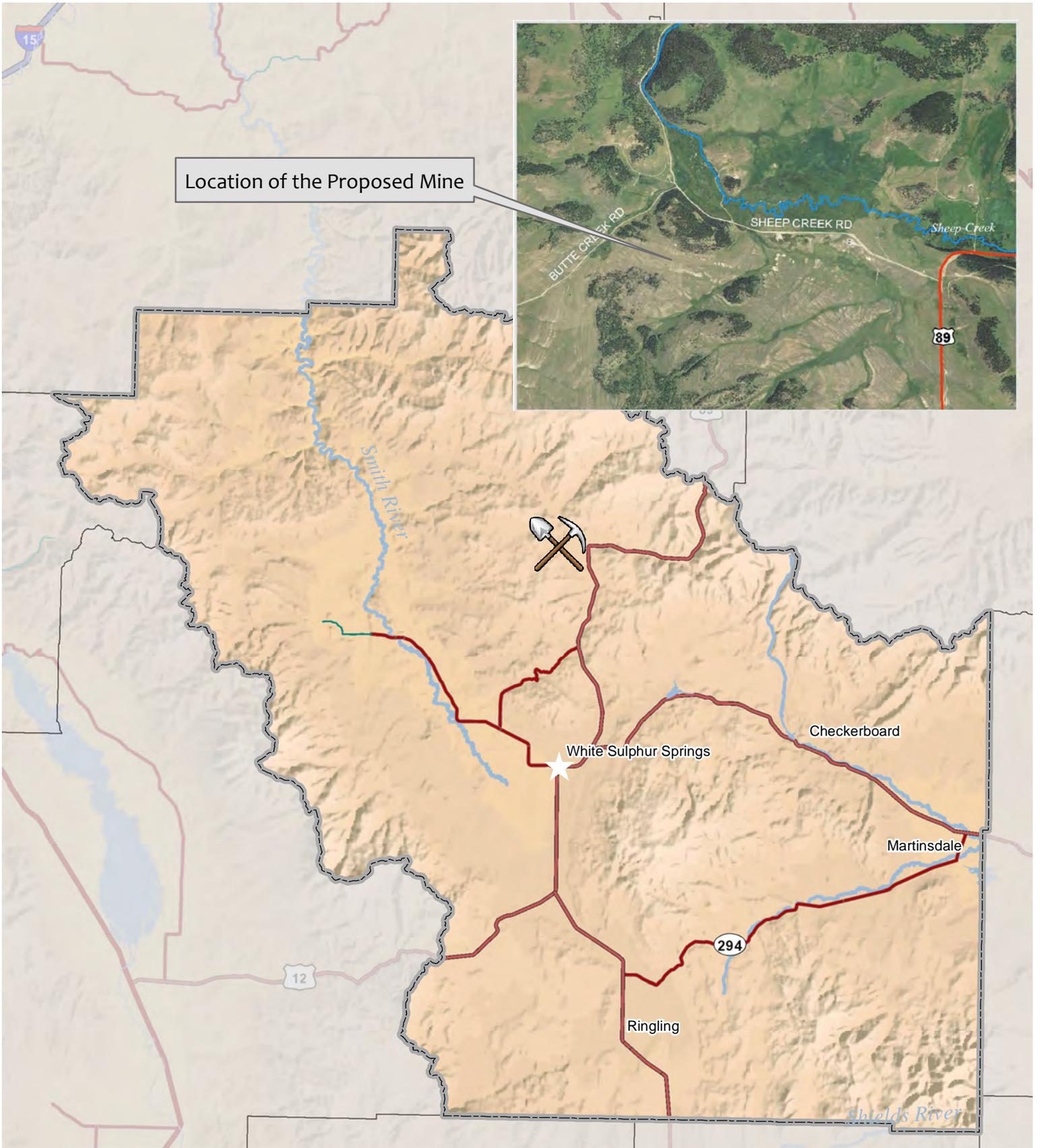
Exploration for oil and gas resources has occurred in southern Meagher County, but to date, no active production has taken place.



Sand & Gravel Resources

Sand and gravel are an important resource for the construction and maintenance of roads as well as the construction of new homes and businesses. According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Open Cut

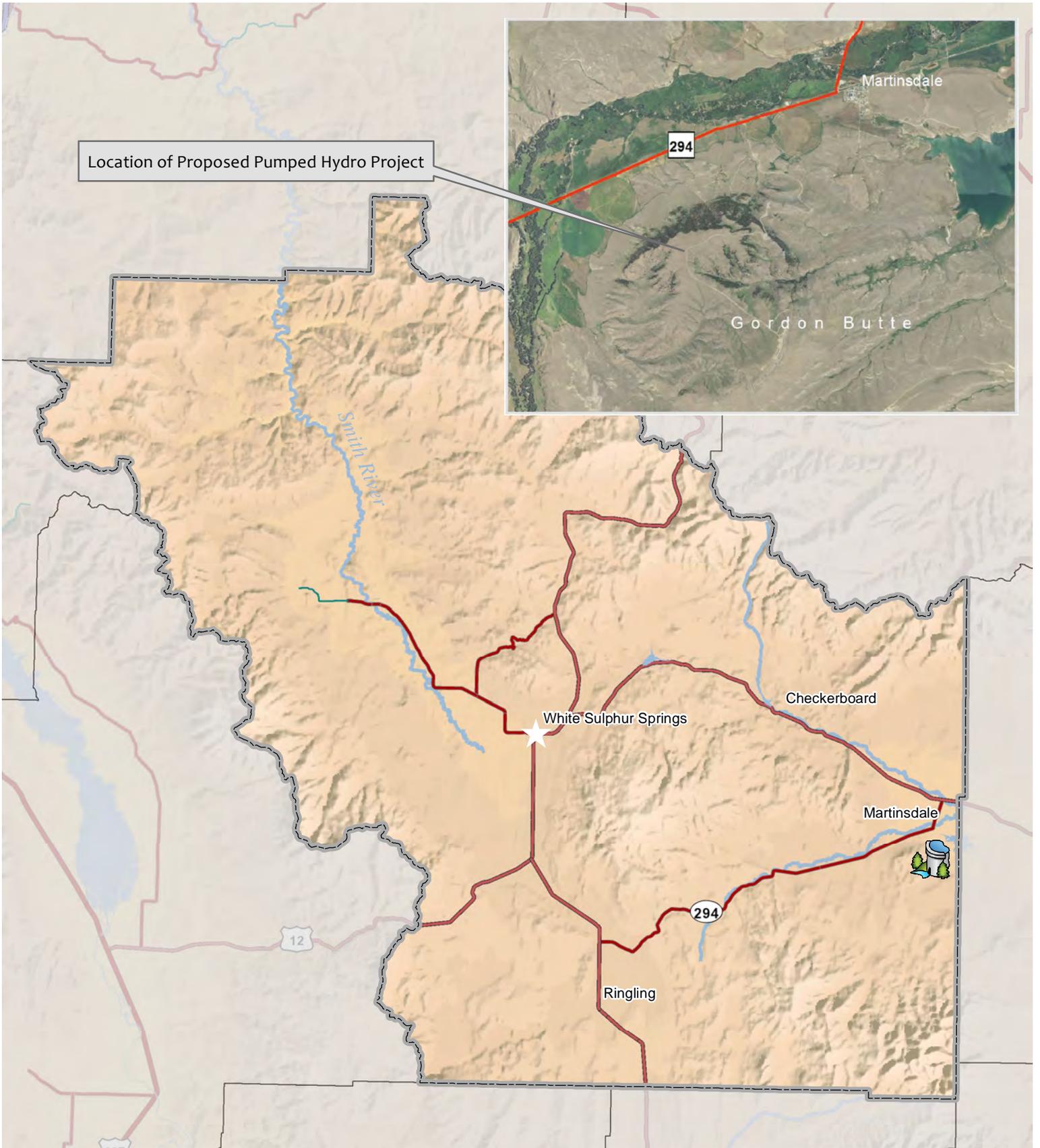
Mining Program there are 16 gravel pits permitted in the County. Of those sixteen pits, 9 are owned by Meagher County and the other 7 are privately owned. Mapping sand and gravel resources in the County is challenging due the lack of access to a soil survey for the County in either a digital or hardcopy format.



Proposed Copper Mine



MAP 5
LOCATION
OF PROPOSED
COPPER MINE



Proposed Pumped
Hydro Project



0 5 10 20 Miles

MAP 6
LOCATION
OF PROPOSED
PUMPED HYDRO
PROJECT

Timber Resources



The County has significant timber resources. Of the total area of the County (1,458,335 acres), 452,084 acres or 31 percent is classified as being covered in forest. Most of those timber resources are located on lands owned and managed by the United State Forest Service.

Traditionally the County had a strong timber industry. According the 2003 Growth Policy, from 1997 to 1998 the industry provided 75 jobs

and which generated a total personal income of \$1,200,000. This situation changed dramatically in the mid 2000’s. In 1998, the County saw a total harvest of timber equaling 27 million board feet (MMBF), by 2009 this had declined to 3 MMBF. Declining harvests are due to many factors, including lower demand for lumber following the recession, the difficulty in obtaining approval for timber harvests on Federal lands and the increasing operational costs in the industry.

Privately owned forests now provide the majority of timber harvested in the County. In fact, while harvest on Federal lands has dramatically decreased, private timberland harvest has held relatively steady from 3,141 thousand board feet (MBF) in 2002 to 4,191 MBF in 2014.

Year	Private Forest Land	Forest Service	Total MBF
2002	3,141	5,962	9,103
2003	4,378	3,282	7,660
2004	4,013	2,278	6,291
2005	2,900	1,375	4,275
2006	2,596	585	3,181
2007	3,081	897	3,978
2008	2,584	1,144	3,728
2009	1,792	976	2,768
2010	4,375	765	5,140
2011	2,113	745	2,858
2012	4,236	2,591	6,827
2013	3,930	1,184	5,114
2014	4,191	33	4,224

Table 2: Timber Harvest in Meagher County 2002-2014
 Source: (Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 2015)

Tourism



Meagher County contains world class natural assets that make it a tourist destination. The Smith River attracts floaters and anglers from all around the world. Hunters flock to the County during the fall to pursue elk, deer and antelope on public and private land. Other recreational pursuits include downhill skiing at Showdown Ski Area, snowmobiling in the surrounding mountains and soaking in the hot springs in White Sulphur Springs.

Tourism and recreational pursuits in the County include:

- Big game Hunting
- Fishing
- Floating the Smith River
- Music festival
- Skiing at Showdown Ski Area
- Snowmobiling
- Soaking at the hot springs
- Etc.



Floating the spectacular Smith River is the most well known recreational activity in the County. Upwards of 600 groups and almost 5,000 people float the river annually, depending upon whether there are sufficient flows of water. The annual Labor Day Rodeo is also a significant draw for people at the end of the summer tourist season.

The City of White Sulphur Springs is the hub of recreation in the County and experiences a year round flow of recreationists. Encouraging

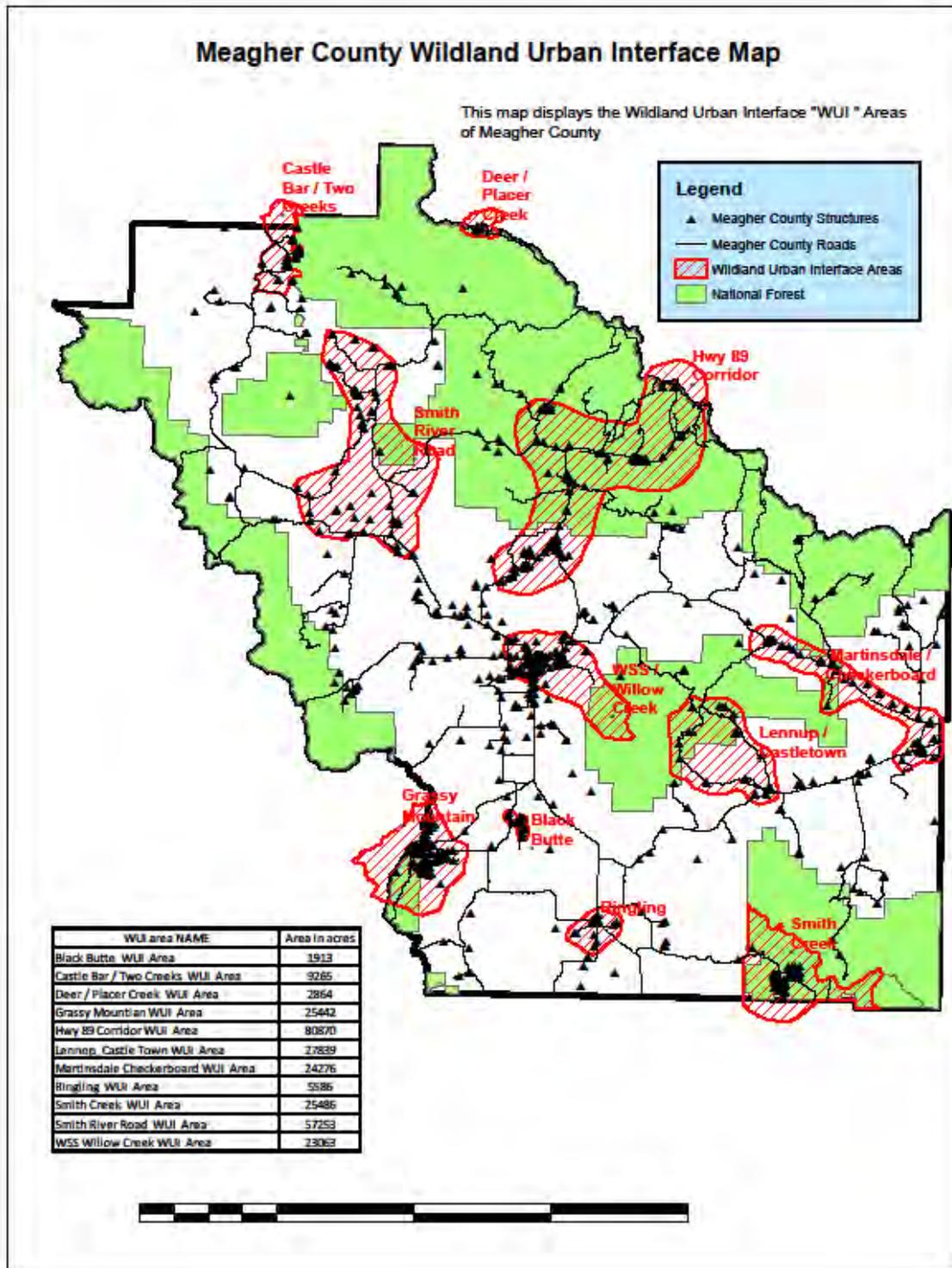


these people to stay longer in the City would be an important step toward enhancing the County’s tourism economy. Ultimately, tourism has the potential for significant growth; the key will be identifying the steps necessary to make that happen, which could include better marketing and infrastructure.



Meagher County Wildfire Protection Plan 2014

Meagher County's Wildland Urban Interface Area "WUI" Map



Wildland Urban Interface



Like most counties in the western-central part of the State, Meagher County is facing increased residential development in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). The WUI is generally considered to be the private lands immediately adjacent to forested public lands and residential housing built in the WUI may be at greater risk from wildfires.

Development in the WUI poses challenges for the County and the State and Federal agencies that provide fire protection. In many instances, residential areas in the County's WUI are accessed by poorly constructed, dead-end roads and often times there is little or no space between the forest and the structures. Protecting residential homes built in the WUI is expensive and often puts officials in a difficult position of choosing between either protecting structures or the safety of fire fighters.

Meagher County worked in conjunction with Cascade and Chouteau counties to develop a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The CWPP was created to assist the County, Meagher County Fire Department and the Federal and State agencies in the identification of private and public lands that are at risk of severe wildland fires and to explore strategies for the prevention and/or the quick suppression of such fires the original plan was adopted by the County Commission in 2008, with an update completed in 2014. The overall goals of the updated plan are:

- Improve planning and fire management tools for county and the county fire department alike, which will allow Meagher County to provide its citizens with the means to live more safely in a fire prone ecosystem.
- The CWPP fosters the preservation of the economy of Meagher County by maintaining and improving the efficiency of fire protection in the County.



For more information, refer to the 2014 Meagher County Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Wind Energy Generation



The development of substantial wind generation in Meagher County is limited in comparison to the neighboring counties of Cascade, Judith Gap and Wheatland. The lack of wind generation is due to topography and the characteristics of wind resources in the County.

Electrical Transmission

The County does have the potential to take advantage of the development of additional electrical transmission lines. Currently there is one 500 KV line and two 100 KV lines that traverse the County. Further development of wind generation projects in the surrounding counties and the potential for the pump hydro project at Gordon Butte, all point toward the need for additional capacity to transmit electricity.

Housing

Supplying sound, affordable housing has been a challenge for Meagher County. In 2012, the County had 1,322 housing units, of which, 46 percent were vacant. This vacancy rate is significantly higher than that found in other Montana counties. This vacancy rate is likely attributable to a combination of the out-migration of working age families, the aging of the housing stock and a very high proportion of seasonal residences located in the County.



Housing Units in Meagher County (2012)		
Occupied	Seasonal	Built Prior to 1959
716	534	519
54.2%	40.4%	39.3%

Table 3: Housing Characteristics in Meagher County (2012)

Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2012 Washington, D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System (headwaterseconomics.org/eps)



Much of the County's housing stock is over 60 years old, with 519 units or 39 percent having been built prior to 1959, with many of the structures are either in need of rehabilitation or demolition. The age of the County's housing stock is highlighted in the 2008 assessment data from the Montana Department of Revenue. The data identified approximately 1,043 residential structures in the County. Of those structures, 155 were classified as being in either unsound or poor physical condition.

Condition of Residential Structures – Entire County		
Condition	Number of Structures	Percentage
Unsound	17	1.6%
Poor	138	13.3%
Fair	255	24.5%
Average	413	39.5%
Good	194	18.6%
Excellent	26	2.5%

Table 4: Condition of Housing in Meagher County (2008)

Source: Montana Department of Revenue

The situation in the City of White Sulphur Springs is similar. The Department of Revenue data identified 399 residential structures located within the City. Of those structures, 81 were found to be in either unsound or poor condition.

Condition of Residential Structures – White Sulphur Springs		
Condition	Number of Structures	Percentage
Unsound	5	1.3%
Poor	76	19.05%
Fair	138	34.6%
Average	131	32.8%
Good	46	11.53%
Excellent	2	0.5%

Table 5: Condition of Housing in White Sulphur Springs (2008)

Source: Montana Department of Revenue

As noted in the Table 3 above, seasonal housing makes up a large percentage of the housing stock in the County. In 2012, 534 residential structures that were classified as seasonal,



meaning that over 40 percent of the housing stock is only occupied on a seasonal or recreational basis. This seasonal occupancy is also significantly higher than that found in the other “non-metro” Montana counties. Non-metro counties are all Montana counties not including Cascade, Missoula and Yellowstone. Encouraging the development of seasonal housing in appropriate places, such as outside the WUI, could improve the County’s taxable

value.

As mentioned earlier in this document, there are several potential natural resource related projects that could cause the quick consumption of the existing housing stock if they become a reality. Rapid development of housing for the construction workforces for the resource projects would be necessary and it would need to be provided in a relatively short period of time.



Whether the proposed mine or pumped hydro projects become a reality, the County still has a significant housing issue that needs to be examined in detail and steps taken to improve the current housing stock.

DRAFT

Local Services & Public Facilities

Providing services and maintaining infrastructure in an effective and economical manner are a primary function of the County. Services include law enforcement, fire protection, search and rescue and road maintenance. The infrastructure that the County is responsible for runs the gambit from roads and bridges to buildings and facilities such as the solid waste transfer station. Services and infrastructure are also provided to residents by local non-profit organizations, such as the hospital, library and senior center which are operated and maintained by non-profits.

Airport

White Sulphur Springs Airport is the only operational public airport in the County and is located three miles south of White Sulphur Springs. The airport has a 6,100 foot asphalt runway and aviation fuel available. The property encompassing the airport is sufficient for further expansion of the facility if needed.



Continuum of Care



The senior center/pre-school facility was constructed in 1995. The senior center portion of the facility includes a kitchen and dining area capable of serving up to 150 people. It also contains a recreation room. The pre-school is operated separately from the senior center, but centrally located doors allow access between the two facilities. Meagher County Senior Citizens Association operates the center as a non-profit

organization under an inter-local agreement with the County. The Center serves the entire community and is often rented for weddings and other community gatherings.

Emergency Medical Services

As of 2014, there were 18 certified emergency medical technicians (EMT's) and 3 ambulances to



provide emergency medical services in the County.

Fire Protection

As of 2014, there were three fire protection agencies located within the County:

- The City of White Sulphur Springs
- Meagher County Fire
- Martinsdale Fire Service Area

These agencies were manned by 58 volunteer fire fighters and their equipment included:

- 24 (Type 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6) engines and tenders located throughout the County.
- 12 dry hydrants throughout the County



Hospital

Mountainview Medical Center is the County’s only hospital and is designated as a Critical Access Hospital (CAH). The Medical Center is a non-profit corporation and provides inpatient, outpatient, long term care, diagnostics and emergency services. The Center has 25 beds and a full time staff that includes: one medical doctor, one physician's assistant, one family nurse practitioner, four day nurses and three night nurses. The emergency department is staffed twenty four hours seven days a week. The facility



has a 16 slice CT scanner and the hospital has a connection to broadband fiber optic cable allowing it to transmit data anywhere in the world.

The Center underwent a \$2.6 million dollar renovation in the mid-2000’s to improve its facilities and service. The renovation and remodeling of the hospital began in June of 2003 were completed in December of 2004.



Law Enforcement

The Meagher County Sheriff Department serves as the law enforcement agency for both the County and the City of White Sulphur Springs. The Department’s staff includes the Sheriff,

Under Sherriff, 2 full-time deputies, 4 reserve deputies, 1 dispatch supervisor and 6 dispatchers.

The Sheriff Department's is in need of a modern law enforcement center in order to provide efficient and safe services.

Library

According to the library's current website, the facility houses over 16,000 books, assorted magazines, 1,153 movies on DVD/VHS, over 9,000 electronic books and 1,000 audio books. The Library Foundation Board has purchased land for a new facility and has to date raised approximately \$800,000 to construct a modern and energy efficient structure to house the library's collections.



Martinsdale Water and Sewer District

The District operates and maintains a drinking water system for the unincorporated community of Martinsdale. The District recently completed improvements to the system including a new 200,000-gallon bolted steel water tank. In addition to the construction of a new storage tank, a second spring source for the Town was developed, and approximately 12,000 feet of new transmission piping was installed to increase the Town's water system capacity and fire protection.

Museums

The County has two museums, the Meagher County Museum located in White Sulphur Springs and the Bair Family Museum in Martinsdale.



The Meagher County Museum is known locally as the "Castle" and was built as a mansion in 1892 by Byron Roger Sherman. The building is in original condition with 12 rooms, hardwood floors, Italian marble in the bathrooms and light fixtures of crystal and brass. The Victorian structure is made of hand-cut granite

blocks and is complete with period furniture, mineral samples, clothing and artifacts from the region's past. The Meagher County Historical Association operates and maintains the museum.

The Charles M. Bair Family Museum is named after Charles M. Bair, who came to Montana and worked as a conductor for the Northern Pacific Railroad. He went into the ranching business in 1891 and became one of the area's most successful sheep ranchers. He made his fortune in the Alaskan gold rush and went on to invest in banks, mining, oil and real estate. The museum is located adjacent to the Bair family home in Martinsdale and features four art galleries which exhibit the Bair family's art collection.

Parks and Recreation

While the County does not own or maintain any parkland or recreational facilities, residents understand the value and need for such places.



In order to begin the process of accumulating funds for the development and maintenance of parks and recreational facilities near residential developments, the County should only accept cash-in-lieu of parkland dedications from future subdividers.

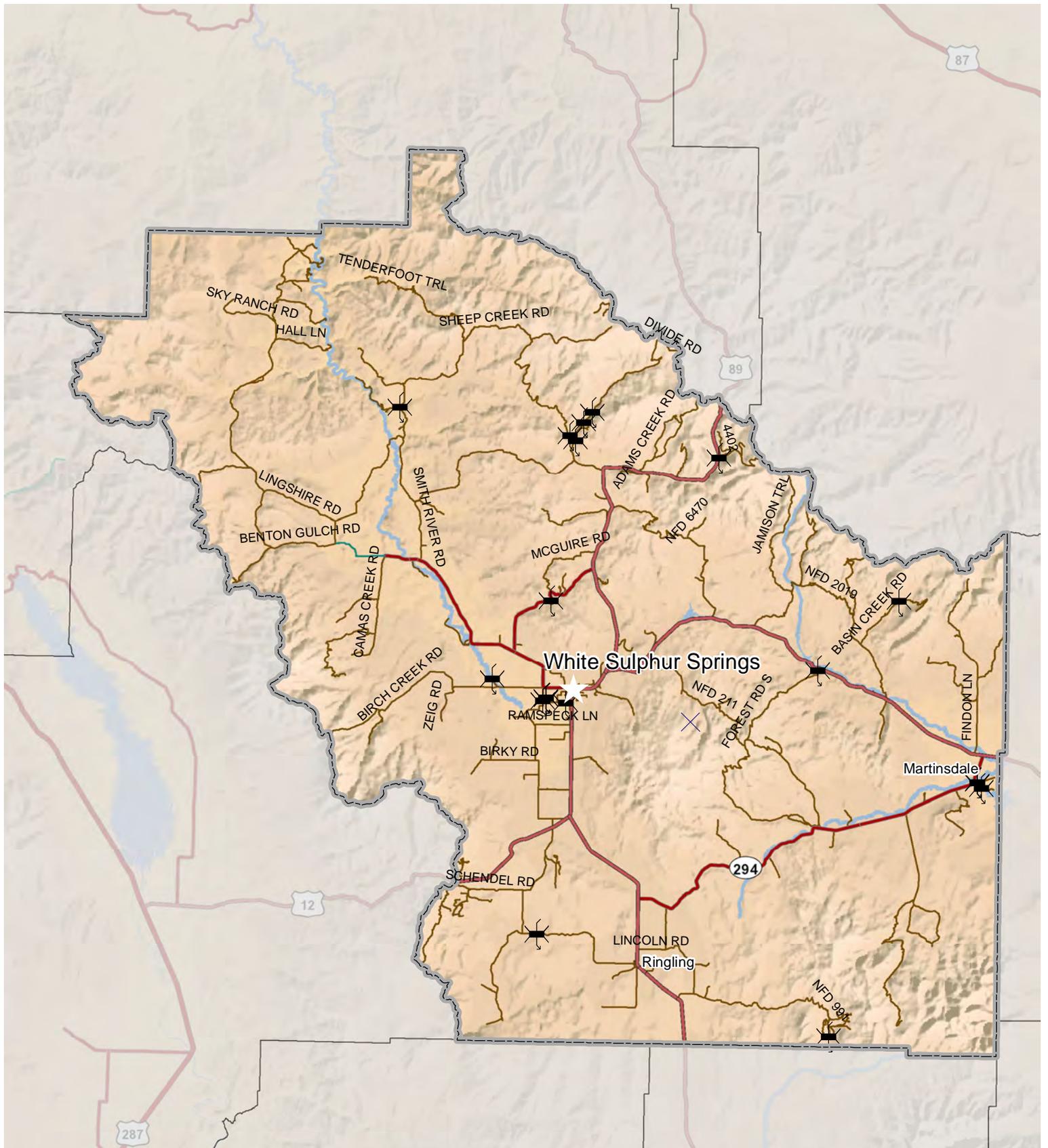
In order to take advantage of cash-in-lieu, the County must first develop a parks plan that would outline the County's needs for parks and how any collected park funds would be used.

The County should also coordinate with MT FWP and the USFS to ensure that there are adequate and will maintained recreational facilities located on public lands, including picnic tables, restroom facilities, signage and trailhead infrastructure etc.

Roads & Bridges

The County Road Department maintains approximately 200 miles of roads. Most of these roads are gravel surfaced and provide access to ranch and farm operations and to the surrounding public lands. In addition to roads, the County has maintenance responsibilities for 10 bridges.





 Bridges
 Road



MAP 8: MEAGHER COUNTY ROADS & BRIDGES



For a County with low taxable values, it is critical that the maintenance and replacement of roads and bridges be done in as a cost effective manner as possible. This situation is made even more challenging by the fact that the County has responsibility for maintaining the roads used to access the Smith River launch site at Camp Baker, including Fort Logan Road and the Smith River Road. It is 26 road miles

from White Sulphur Springs to Camp Baker.

As mentioned earlier, almost 5,000 people float the Smith annually and most of those people access Camp Baker via Fort Logan Road and the Smith River Road. This is a significant amount of vehicle traffic, which doesn't take into account traffic from guides and other people supporting the operations of floaters. The County would like to develop a partnership with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to identify sources of funding to help cover the costs of maintaining those roads. The County would also like to develop a partnership with the USFS in order to ensure that maintenance to County roads accessing Forest Service lands are safe and efficient.

Because of the difficulty in maintaining its current inventory of roads, the County will not accept maintenance responsibility for any new roads. Thus the property owners in any new developments, including subdivisions will be responsible for the construction and maintenance of their onsite roads.

In order to prioritize the maintenance, replacement and funding of County roads and bridges, the County will consider developing and adopting a capital improvements plan. In addition, the County will examine other potential funding opportunities for maintain and replacing road and bridge infrastructure. Options to be reviewed may include a local option motor fuel tax as defined under Montana statute (7-14-301, MCA).

Schools

There are two schools in Meagher County; both located in White Sulphur Springs. White Sulphur Springs Elementary School teaches grades K-8 and in 2014 had an enrollment of 95 students. The school employs 7 teachers and has 10 classrooms. White Sulphur Springs High School serves grades



9-12, has an enrollment of 58 students and employs 9 teachers. The High School has 14 classrooms. Of the 16 teachers in the district, 6 are shared between the elementary school and high school.

The facilities are aging and will need to be renovated and/or replaced at some point in the near future. In September of 2015, the community voted on a \$9.4 million bond to help fund the construction of a new addition to the school, renovate existing facilities and to remove hazardous materials. The bond passed overwhelmingly.



Solid Waste

According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, the County has two licensed solid waste facilities: The Meagher County Solid Waste Transfer Station and Meagher County Solid Waste Landfill. The transfer station can process no more than 10,000 tons of waste and is located ½ mile southeast of White Sulphur Springs.



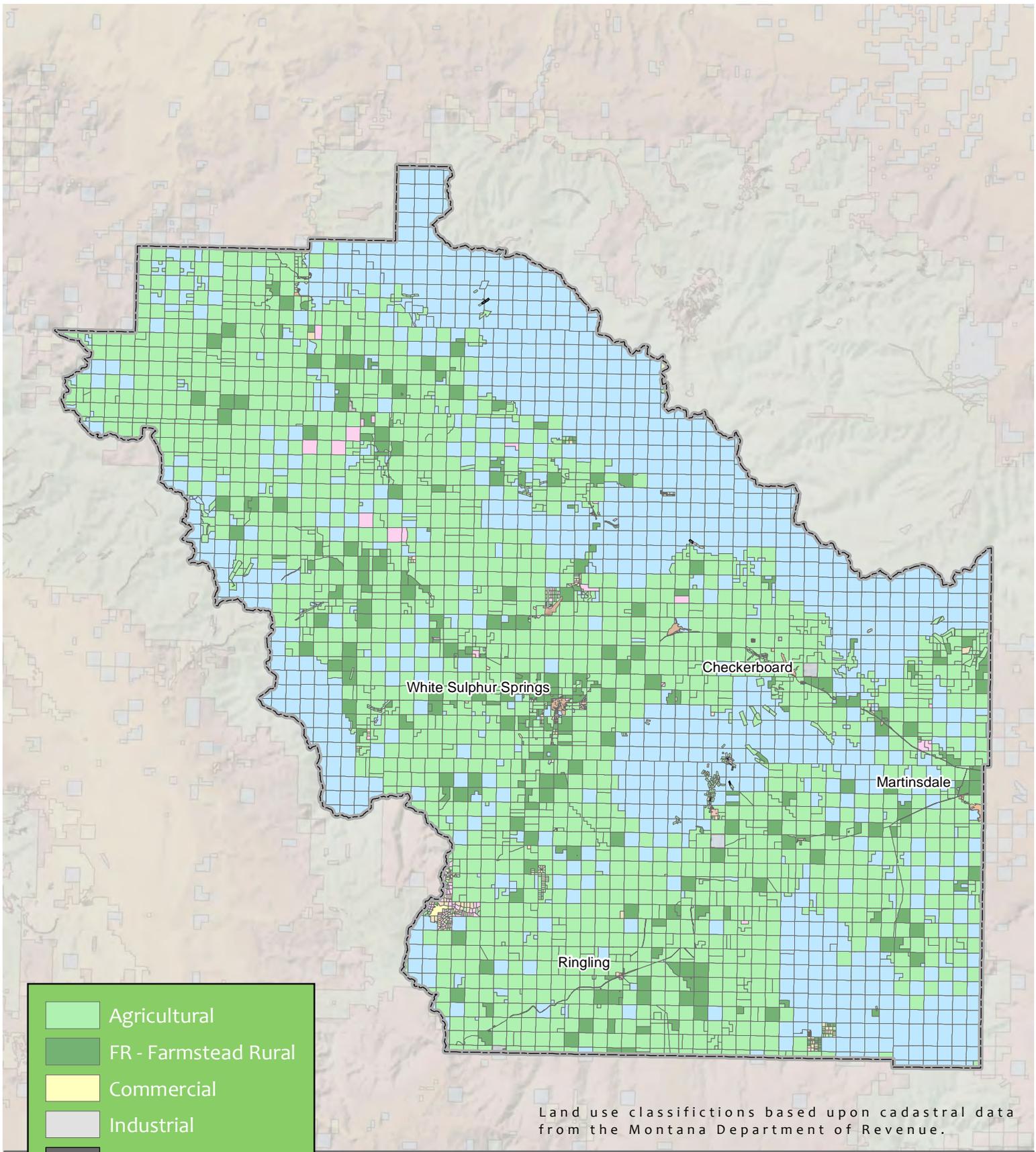
The landfill is classified as a Class III facility by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and may accept only Group III wastes. Group III wastes include wood wastes and non-water soluble solids.

The maximum tonnage for the landfill is 1,000 tons or less, which is primarily tree branches and leaves which the County burns onsite.

Telecommunications

People living in White Sulphur Springs have access to what is known as Fiber to the home (FTTH), which is the provision of high speed broadband internet service through the installation and use of optical fiber connected directly to individual buildings such as residences, apartment buildings and businesses and can provide very high-speed Internet access. FTTH dramatically increases the connection speeds available to users compared to the current technologies being used in many Montana communities. FTTH marketed correctly could provide White Sulphur Springs and the County with a competitive edge in attracting businesses and home based professionals.

Triangle Communications provides telecommunications services, including broadband internet, local and long distance telephone to Meagher County. Verizon and ATT&T are the cellular telephone providers in the County.



Land use classifications based upon cadastral data from the Montana Department of Revenue.

- Agricultural
- FR - Farmstead Rural
- Commercial
- Industrial
- Mining Claim
- Mixed Use
- Public Land
- Residential
- Vacant Land



MAP 9 MEAGHER COUNTY EXISTING LAND USE

Land Use

Existing Land Use



Meagher County contains a substantial number of developed residential lots located outside of the City of White Sulphur Springs. In fact, a Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis of the Cadastral data from the Montana Department of Revenue (DOR) indicates that there are 424 parcels in the County classified as rural residential by DOR and that are developed with some sort of dwelling. The Cadastral data also shows that there are 234 parcels classified as vacant rural, which means they currently do not have a residential structure on them, but could eventually be developed with a dwelling. These rural residential and vacant rural parcels are located throughout the County, some adjacent to the

City of White Sulphur Springs, others in the surrounding mountains. One thing to note is that the GIS analysis did not take into account the lands that are currently classified as agricultural but could be sold and developed for residential purposes.



Ultimately, an increase in low density, rural housing could have significant fiscal implications for the County as it is more expensive for the County to provide services to housing that is not located near existing development. These higher costs are primarily due to the long distances involved in providing emergency services and the costs of maintaining many miles of gravel roads.



Studies done on behalf of Beaverhead County in 2007 and for Gallatin County in 2009 examined the fiscal impact of rural development verify this. These analyses found that it would cost both counties significantly more in tax dollars to provide emergency services and road maintenance to new residential subdivisions if they were not located near existing communities.



It is with these issues in mind, that the County would like to encourage new residential development to be located near or adjacent to existing communities such as White Sulphur Springs, Checkerboard, Lennep, Martinsdale and Ringling. This communities and areas are identified on Map 11.

New Residential Subdivisions

Rural residential development poses many challenges for the County. The further development is located from the County's established communities, the more expensive it becomes to provide services. The more road miles traveled by residential traffic, the more expensive maintenance becomes. The longer the distance from law enforcement, fire protection and ambulance services the more it costs to provide those services and the longer response times become.

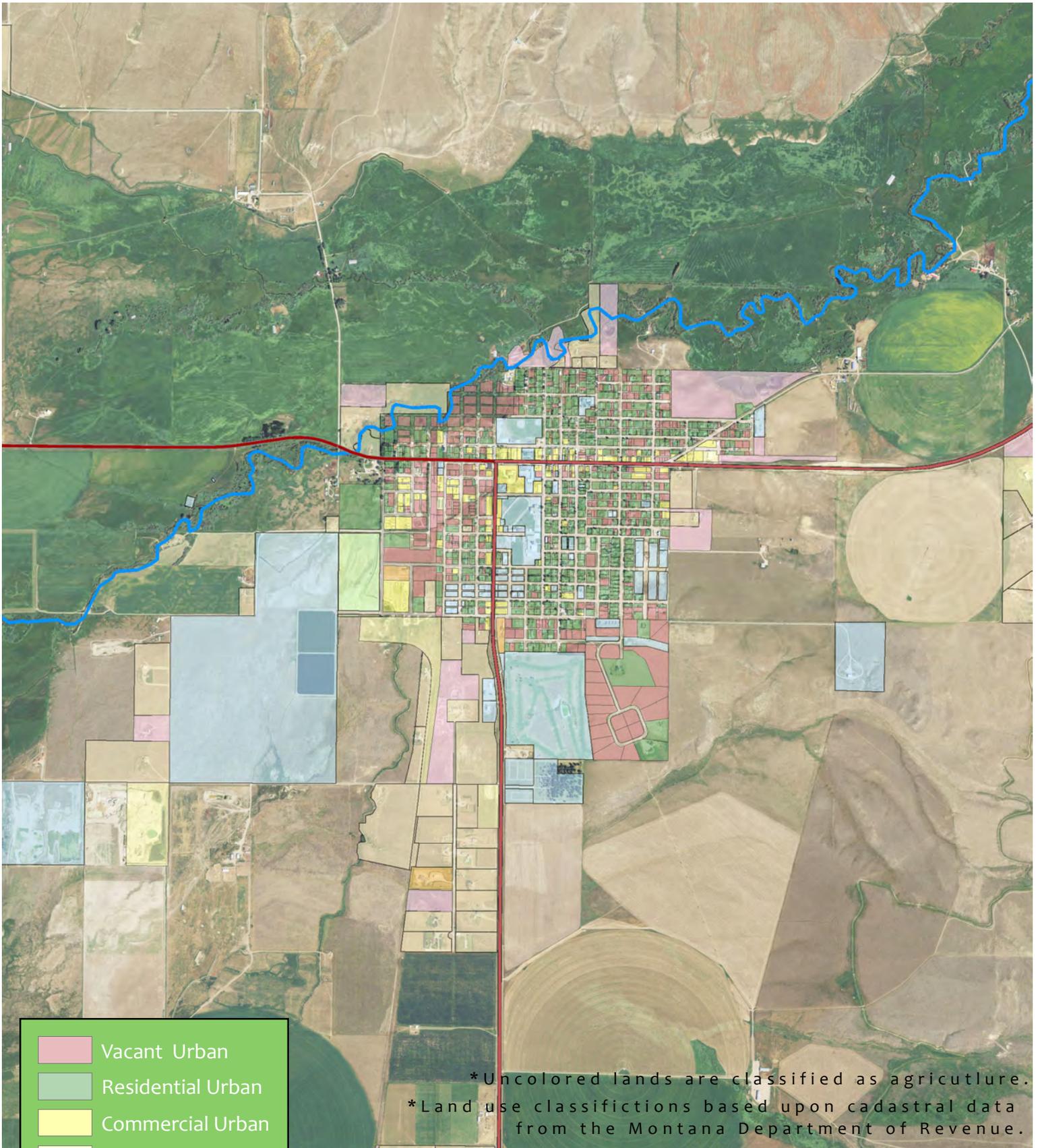
In addition to distance, people building new permanent or seasonal structures are often attracted to properties in the wildland urban interface (WUI). Home construction in the WUI, increases the burden upon the County and State and Federal agencies when called upon to provide fire protection.

Also, as noted before, agricultural operations and residential development are not always compatible and the location of residences near ranches and farms can make it much more difficult for producers to efficiently and safely run their operations.



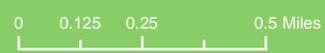
Right to Farm Ordinance

In order to protect agricultural operations from the impact of new residential development, the County could consider providing new homeowners with a notification of the County's adopted "Right to Farm Ordinance." The notification would let new homeowners know that ranching and farming are important elements of the County's culture and economy and that they must be prepared to accept the activities, sights, sounds, and smells of the County's agricultural operations as a normal and necessary aspect of living in the County. The notification could take place when the County Sanitarian issues a permit for new septic systems associated with the construction of new homes.



* Uncolored lands are classified as agriculture.
 * Land use classifications based upon cadastral data from the Montana Department of Revenue.

- Vacant Urban
- Residential Urban
- Commercial Urban
- Commercial
- Mixed Use
- Public Land
- Residential
- Vacant Land



MAP 10 MEAGHER COUNTY EXISTING LAND USE

White Sulphur Springs
and Surrounding Lands

Temporary Housing- Impact of Resource Development

If the proposed copper mine or proposed pumped hydro electric projects become a reality, there will be two phases of impact upon land use and the housing market in the County. The first will occur during the construction phase for each and the second during the operations phase. During the construction phase a significant number of temporary workers will move to the County. With regards to the proposed mine, estimates are as high as 296 people moving to the County.



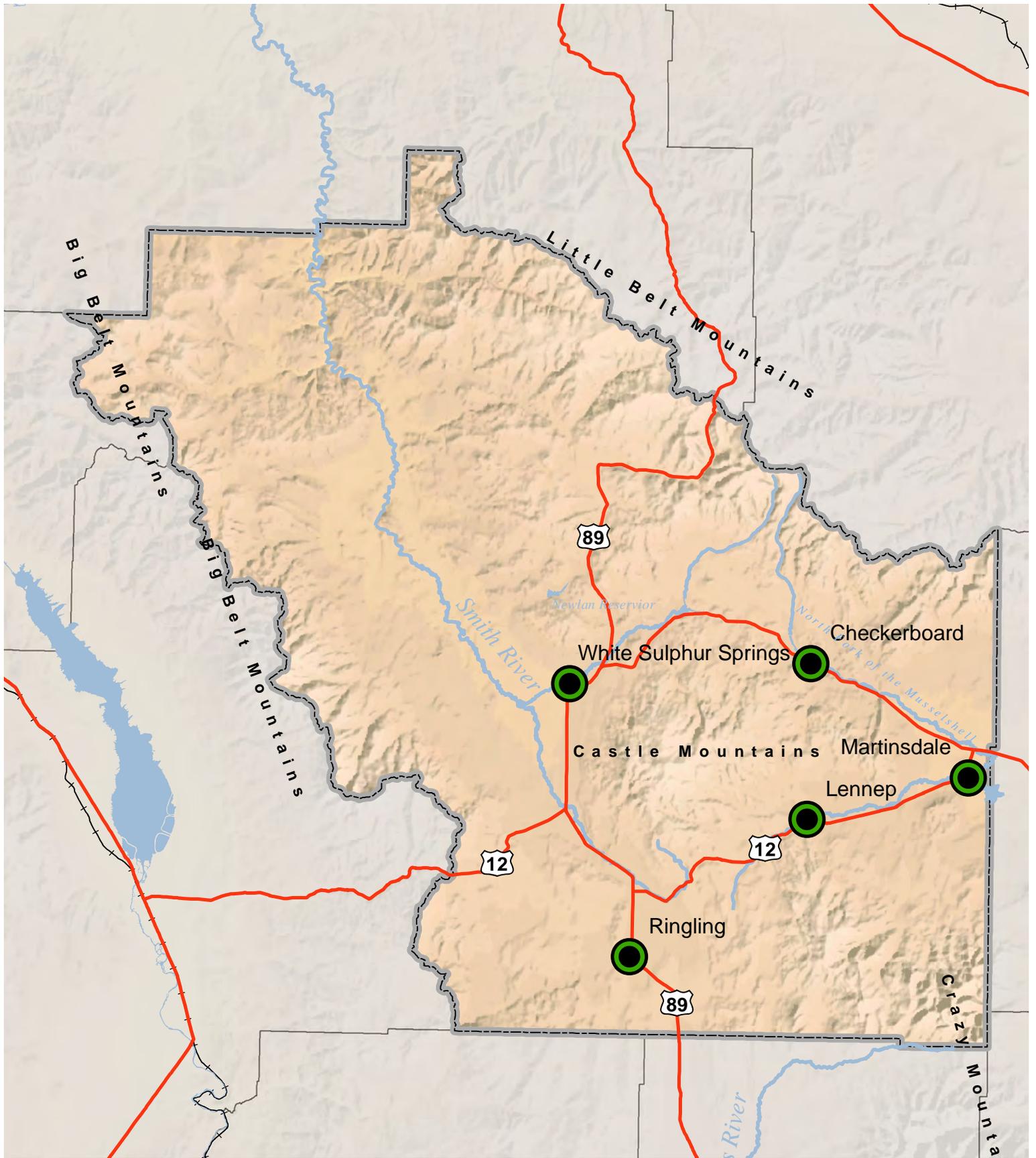
With the condition of the existing housing stock in the County, these workers may find their options for housing limited. With an estimated construction schedule of 15 to 18 months for the mine, the housing options that are selected by construction workers may tend towards temporary RV/camp trailers and rental housing. Regardless of what type of housing the workers select, the County and the City need to be prepared to address the associated impacts.

The same holds true for the pumped hydro project. The temporary construction workforce is estimated to be upwards of 350 and they would be working on the project for up to 36 months. The same housing issues that would occur with the proposed mine would also result with that project, the difference being that Martinsdale, Harlowton and the surrounding area would likely bear most of the impact versus White Sulphur Springs.

A number of tools are available to the County in order to address temporary housing for a construction workforce.

- County Subdivision Regulations (*mandatory under statute*)
- Buildings for Lease or Rent Review Procedures (*mandatory under statute*)
- Temporary Workforce Housing Regulations (*optional under statute*)

As mentioned earlier either the County could work through the Hard Rock Mining Impact Board to require the developers of the mine to provide temporary workforce housing (man-camps) for the construction workforce, similar in nature to what has happened in the Bakken and other areas that have experienced resource booms. This type of a facility, located near the mine, could help to alleviate the need for temporary housing during the construction phase. It could also help to minimize the impacts associated with scattered RV camps and temporary rental housing in the County. In lieu of temporary workforce housing being provided by the developer of a project, the County may want to consider developing and implementing temporary workforce regulations to ensure that the housing for a



 Preferred Development Area



**MAP 11:
MEAGHER COUNTY
PREFERRED AREAS FOR
RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT**

construction workforce is designed to protect public health and safety and to ensure that necessary services and infrastructure are provided.



Permanent Housing- Impact of the Resource Development

It is likely that a significant proportion of the operational workforce for both the proposed mine and pumped hydro projects would choose to live in Meagher County. Estimates are that

upwards of 396 new people would move into the County as a result of the operation of the mine, with many opting to live in single-family dwellings.

The County and City would prefer to guide new permanent residential development into the City and other established communities where services such as fire protection, law enforcement, drinking water and wastewater treatment can be provided much more efficiently. Because the City has sufficient drinking water and wastewater treatment capacity and an abundance of buildable lots, an opportunity exists to facilitate new development within the City. This could be accomplished through infill development (building on vacant lots) or through the annexation of additional lands for subdivision. It must be noted that the City does not currently have a zoning code; hence the management of land use following annexation and subdivision will be difficult.

The operational workforce for the pumped hydro project is estimated at 20-24 persons. Again it is likely that many of these people will decide to reside in the County, whether it is in Martinsdale or White Sulphur Springs or elsewhere.

For those permanent housing developments that occur in the County's jurisdiction there are options to ensure that new housing is developed in a manner that is safe, mitigates impacts and provides adequate infrastructure and services to the new homeowners at limited expense to the taxpayers.

Those options include:

- County Subdivision Regulations (*mandatory under statute*)
- Buildings for Lease or Rent Review Procedures (*mandatory under statute*)
- Development Regulations (*optional under statute*)

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

MBAC is assisting the county to plan for Tintina Resources new mine, we want to know your opinion on what are the needs for White Sulphur Springs.

TOP THREE TO IMPROVE IN WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS ONLY RANK 3 ITEMS TOTAL

Rank Priority 1, 2, 3	Improve
	Water system
	Sewer system
	Library
	Jobs
	Downtown buildings
	Police
	Fire Protection
	Roads
	More Stores
	Parks
	More apartments
	Other:

Public input has been essential in developing this document. To date, three public meetings have been held to discuss the Growth Policy. The first was held on March 14, 2013, with approximately 20 residents in attendance, the second on May 15, 2014 and a Planning Board hearing on the draft growth policy was held on November 16, 2015.

In addition to public meetings, two surveys were distributed to the residents of White Sulphur Springs and the County in order to determine what they considered priorities. The surveys were distributed by the Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC). The first survey focused on County needs in light of the potential development

of the copper mine north of White Sulphur Springs. During the initial survey, 511 surveys were mailed out, 229 were completed and returned, which was an almost a 42 percent response rate. Respondents to the survey were asked to prioritize a list of 12 items. Overwhelmingly, respondents identified the creation of new jobs as the primary need of the City and the County. The next three identified needs were: road/street maintenance, upgrade of the City’s drinking water systems and upgrade of the City’s sewer system. These were followed by the remainder of the survey list.

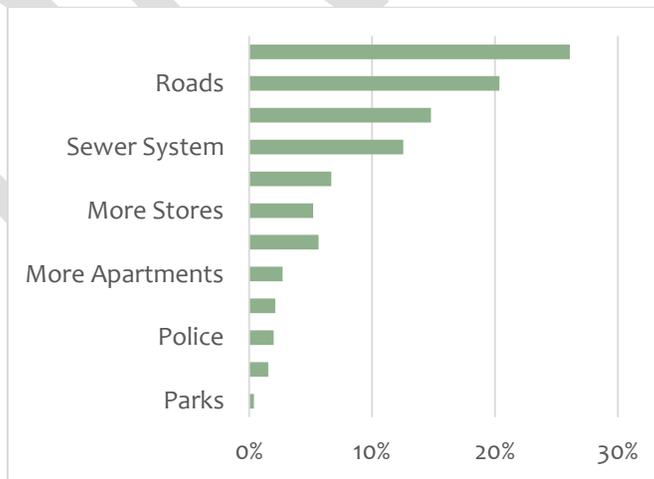
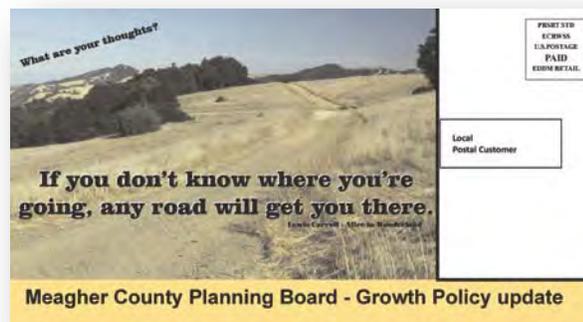


Figure 6: Needs as Identified in First Survey

The second survey asked much broader questions regarding the needs of the County. An abbreviated version of the survey was mailed out as a postcard in September of 2015 and an electronic survey was made available through the Internet via Survey Monkey. Drop off locations for completed hardcopy surveys were provided at the Chamber of Commerce, Clerk and Recorder's Office and at the Senior Center. In addition, responses to the Survey Monkey survey were compiled online. The survey was also advertised in the Meagher County News.



62 people responded to the survey and 12 people responded to the postcard. 79 percent of respondents to the online survey indicated that they lived in White Sulphur Springs and the remainder indicated that lived in the rural areas of the County. Over 95 percent of the online respondents also indicated that they were property owners in the County. Based upon the results of the survey, the following four issues were identified by over 50 percent of respondents as being extremely important:

- Education
- Healthcare/Hospital
- Safe and affordable housing
- Small Town/Rural Lifestyle

The Planning Board has scheduled a public hearing on the draft growth policy for November 16, 2015 at the Senior Center in White Sulphur Springs.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Implementation of the goals identified in this Growth Policy will take time and resources. It will require a variety of methods ranging from incentives and regulations to other planning processes such as capital improvement plans and housing plans. Most important of all implementation will require a commitment by the residents and the County Commission to follow through on the guidance provided by the document.

Implementation Schedule

ECONOMY		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Form an Economic Development Council (EDC) to coordinate and facilitate business growth.	County Commission, City Council, Chamber of Commerce, MBAC	Within 1 year
Market our broadband internet capacity to existing residents, potential new residents and businesses.	Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council (EDC), Montana Business Assistance Connection (MBAC), Triangle Communications	Within 2 years.
Develop an inventory of desirable industrial lots/buildings including their size, available services and electrical service, vehicle access and lease or purchase costs	EDC, MBAC	2-3 years
Protect desirable industrial and commercial sites through land use regulations, purchase options, and lease/purchase agreements	EDC, MBAC	Within 3 years
Develop a tourist/visitor's center.	County Commission, City Council, Chamber of Commerce, EDC	1-3 years
Promote and further market the County's amenities (golf course, museums, National Forests, Smith River, Showdown etc.)	County Commission, City Council, Chamber of Commerce, EDC	Ongoing
Create a business assistance program to offer technical assistance to prospective firms in business plans, marketing analyses, debt management.	EDC, Chamber of Commerce, MBAC, SCORE (Counselors to America's Small Business)	1-2 years

INFRASTRUCTURE		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Develop a comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan	Planning Boards, County Commission, City Council, County and City Staff	Within 2 years
Meet with State and Federal agencies to discuss the maintenance of County roads accessing state and federal lands.	County Commission, Planning Board, Road Department	Within 6 months
Utilize the Hard Rock Mining Act process to address the impacts of mining upon infrastructure.	County Commission, Planning Board, City Council	When the Act is triggered by a project.
Coordinate infrastructure and facility maintenance and replacement with the City.	County Commission, City Council, Planning Boards, County and City Departments	Within 1 year

COMMUNITY SERVICES		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Support funding for the new library.	Library Foundation, County Commissioners	1-2 years
Develop a County-City park and recreation plan for the development and maintenance of facilities.	Planning Boards, County Commission, City Council.	2-4 years
Maintain and upgrade as needed the Senior Center	Meagher County Senior Association, County Commissioners	Ongoing
Support the operation and maintenance of the County's museums.	Meagher County Historical Association, County Commissioners	Ongoing
Utilize the Hard Rock Mining Act process to address the impacts of mining upon community services.	County Commission, Planning Boards, City Council	When the Act is triggered by a project.

EMERGENCY SERVICES		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Develop a comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan	Planning Boards, County Commission, City Council, County and City Staff	Within 2 years

HOUSING		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Undertake a Housing Assessment	Housing Committee, Planning Board, realtors, builders	Within 2 years
Develop a Comprehensive Housing Plan	Housing Committee, Planning Board, realtors, builders	Within 2 years
Utilize the Hard Rock Mining Act process to address the impacts of mining upon housing.	County Commission, Planning Boards, City Council	When the Act is triggered by a project.

LAND USE		
Action	Responsibility	Schedule
Review and/or update County Subdivision Regulations to address issues such as: wildfire mitigation, road construction and maintenance etc.	Planning Board, County Commission, County Attorney	1-2 years
Draft temporary workforce housing Regulations in preparation of resource development.	Planning Board, County Commission, County Attorney	Within 3 years
Implement an agricultural notification system for rural homeowners.	Planning Board, County Sanitarian, Chamber of Commerce, realtors	1-2 years
Coordinate with Federal Agencies on land use planning in the Wildland Urban Interface and areas where hazardous wildland fuels exist near homes.	Planning Board, County Commissioners, Federal Agencies (USDA Forest Service and DOI Bureau of Land Management).	Ongoing
Coordinate with the City on complimentary land use planning and regulations to prepare for future residential development.	Planning Boards, County Commission, City Council	2-3 years

Subdivision Review

The Montana Code Annotated requires that the County Commission provide a statement in the Growth Policy explaining how they will:

- define the criteria in 76-3-608 (3) (a) M.C.A.;
- evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria in 76-3-608 (3) (a) M.C.A.

Definition of 76-3-608 Criteria

Meagher County will use the following definitions as identified in the County Subdivision Regulations for each of the criteria listed below.

- Agriculture: All aspects of farming and ranching including the cultivation or tilling of soil: dairying; the production, cultivation, growing, harvesting of agricultural or horticultural commodities; raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals or poultry; and any practices including forestry or lumbering operations, including for market or delivery to storage, to market, or to carriers for transportation to market.
- Agricultural Water User Facilities: Those facilities, which provide water for irrigation or stock watering to agricultural lands for the production of agricultural products. These facilities include but are not limited to ditches, head gates, pipes and other water conveying facilities.
- Local Services: Are defined as any and all services the local governments, public or private utilities are authorized to provide for the benefit of their citizens.
- Natural Environment: The physical conditions, which exist within a given area including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance.
- Public Health and Safety: The prevailing healthful, sanitary condition of well-being for the community at large. Conditions that relate to public health and safety include but are not limited to: disease control and prevention; emergency services; environmental health; flooding, fire or wildfire hazards; rock falls or landslides, unstable soils, steep slopes and other natural hazards; high voltage lines or high pressure gas lines; and air or vehicular traffic safety hazards.
- Wildlife: Animals (vertebrate and invertebrate) that exist in their natural environment. These exclude domesticated or tamed species.
- Wildlife Habitat: Place or type of site where wildlife naturally lives and grows.

Evaluation of Subdivisions Based Upon 76-3-608 Criteria

Subdivision applications and subdivision review by County staff will include documentation and an analysis of as to whether and to what extent the proposed subdivision will impact agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, the natural environment, wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public health and safety as defined in this Growth Policy.

The County will evaluate each proposed subdivision with regards to the expected impact upon each of the criteria, and the degree to which the subdivision applicant proposes to mitigate any adverse impacts. This evaluation will be based upon the subdivision application, staff review and reports and information gathered from public hearings and other sources of information as deemed appropriate.

Evaluation Criteria for Effects on Agriculture

- a. The number of acres that would be removed from the production of crops or livestock. Acreage will be obtained from Department of Revenue tax records.
- b. Removal of agricultural lands critical to the county's agricultural base. Maps and land capability classifications developed by the USDA Natural Resource Conservation shall be used to determine the agricultural significance of land.
- c. It will be determined whether the unsubdivided parcel is part of a continuing farm or ranch unit by evaluating the use of the remainder and adjoining properties.
- d. Potential conflicts between the proposed subdivision and adjacent agricultural operations shall be evaluated including:
 - Interference with the movement of livestock or farm machinery
 - Interference with agricultural production and activities
 - Maintenance of fences
 - Proliferation of weeds
 - Increased human activity
 - Harassment of livestock by pets

Evaluation Criteria for Effects on Agricultural Water User Facilities

- a. Location and proximity to a ditch, canal, headgate, sprinkler system, watering tank or developed spring shall be considered.
- b. Consider potential subdivision nuisance complaints or problems due to agricultural water user facilities such as safety hazards to residents or water problems from irrigation ditches, headgates, siphons, sprinkler systems or other facilities.
- c. Ownership of water rights and the historic and current use of facility on the proposed subdivision shall be examined. Easements to protect the use of water user facilities on or accessed through a subdivision shall be considered.
- d. Allocation of water rights within a subdivision shall be considered.

Evaluation Criteria for Effects Upon Local Services

- a. Increased demand on services and need to expand services for a proposed subdivision:
 - Sheriff
 - Fire Departments
 - Ambulance Service
 - Schools
 - Roads and Bridges
- b. Cost of services
 - Current and anticipated tax revenues
 - Cost of services for the subdivision
 - Evaluate the need for special or rural improvement districts

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Natural Environment

- a. Expected alteration of any streambanks or lake or reservoir shorelines. Any draining, filling or alteration of any wetland.
- b. Needed cuts and fills on slopes as a result of road or building construction.
- c. Significant removal of vegetation contributing to potential soil erosion or bank or slope instability.
- d. Effect on the level of the aquifer.
- e. Evaluate whether the subdivision design maintains significant open space.

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Public Health and Safety

- a. Potential hazards to residents of subdivision from high voltage lines, high-pressure gas lines, highways, roads, railroads or railroad crossings, nearby industrial or mining activity.
- b. Evaluate existing activities taking place in the vicinity of the subdivision.
- c. Evaluate traffic conditions.
- d. Potential impacts to groundwater quality and quantity from use of septic systems or the withdrawal of water via wells.
- e. Presence of natural hazards such as flooding, rock, snow or landslides, high winds, wildfire, or difficulties such as shallow bedrock, high water table, expansive soils or excessive slopes.

Evaluation Criteria for Effect on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat

- a. Location of subdivision and access roads with respect to critical wildlife areas such as big game wintering range, calving areas, migration routes, nesting areas, wetlands, or habitat for endangered or threatened species.
- b. Expected effects of pets and human activity on wildlife.
- c. Upon completion of its review and evaluation, the County will render a decision on the proposed subdivision with respect to the requirements of the Meagher County Subdivision Regulations, the Meagher County Growth Policy, and the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act.

Public Hearing Procedure

Public hearings on proposed subdivisions will be conducted by the Meagher County Planning Board for subdivision proposals in the County. Hearings shall be structured according to the following procedures:

1. Planning Board President opens the public hearing.
2. Planner provides a summary of the subdivision application and staff report.
3. Subdivision applicant is given an opportunity to make comments.
4. Planning Board members are given an opportunity to ask clarifying questions of the subdivision applicant and planning staff.
5. Members of the public have an opportunity to make comments.
6. Public comment is closed and Planning Board discussion takes place.
7. If Planning Board members feel prepared to make a decision on the application, they will vote to either recommend project approval, conditional approval, or denial.
8. If Planning Board members feel they need more information or time to consider the project before voting, or if the subdivision applicant wishes to modify the project and bring a revised proposal back to the Planning Board, the Board may opt to extend the public hearing in accordance with the review period outlined in statute. An extension of the public hearing must take place with the concurrence of the applicant.
9. Once all public comments have been received within the allowable timeframe, and once the Planning Board has taken its vote, the Planning Board President closes the public hearing.

Coordination with the City of White Sulphur Springs

Meagher County will coordinate efforts with the City of White Sulphur Spring through the following actions:

- Leverage and coordinate resources with the City of White Sulphur Springs in providing infrastructure.
- Encourage the creation of a County-City advisory committee made up of representatives of both the County and City planning boards, the City Council and the County Commission to address issues such as the residential development, subdivision regulations, annexation, zoning and cooperative services agreements.
- Provide regular reports regarding the activities of the County Planning Board to the City Planning Board and vice versa.
- Consider other joint City-County planning strategies.
 - Capital improvements plan
 - Housing Plan
 - Others
- The County will consider the potential to share resources with the City
 - Staff
 - Other

Conditions and Timing for Review and Revision

To be a useful guidance document that will assist the County in making decisions regarding growth and land use issues; the Growth Policy needs to be periodically reviewed and occasional changes made.

The Meagher County Planning Board will review the document every 5 years from the date of its adoption. The Planning Board will be the entity responsible for reviewing the Policy, and will make any recommendations regarding revisions or changes the Board believes necessary to the County Commission. The review will include an evaluation of every section of the Policy. It is anticipated that a full update of the Policy will be necessary within 10 years of its adoption.

The Growth Policy may be revised when a situation or issue has been identified that necessitates changes or when changes are deemed to be in the public interest by the Planning Board or the County Commissioners. It is also possible that Legislative changes to the Growth Policy statutes may require significant amendments or changes. Finally, amendments to the Policy may also be necessary when litigation in this County or elsewhere in Montana sets legal precedent that is clearly contrary to the stated goals, objectives or implementation strategies in the growth policy.

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SOURCES

Introduction

1. Climate data: National Weather Service
2. Population data: United State Census Bureau
3. Vegetation data: United State Geological Survey, GAP Analysis

Population Characteristics

1. ESRI, 2015
2. Gordon Butte Pumped Hyrdo Project Website, 2015
3. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2014
4. Montana Business Assistance Connection, 2014
5. United States Census Bureau

Economy

1. ESRI, 2015
2. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2014
3. United States Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2007 & 2012

Natural Resources

1. Meagher County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2014
2. Gordon Butte Pumped Hyrdo Project Website, 2015
3. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2014
4. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
5. Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research, 2015
6. United States Department of Agriculture, 2007 and 2012
7. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2009

Housing

1. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2014
2. Montana Department of Revenue, 2008

Local Services & Public Facilities

1. Meagher County Community Wildfire Protection Plan, 2014
2. Meagher County Fire Chief, 2014
3. Meagher County Clerk and Recorder, 2015
4. Mountain View Medical Center, 2014
5. Martinsdale Water District: Robert Peccia and Associates website, 2015
6. Meagher County Road Department, 2015
7. White Sulphur Springs Fire Chief, 2014
8. White Sulphur Springs School District, 2015

Land Use

1. Sonoran Institute, 2007 and 2009

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