

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Central Montana Economic Development District, doing business as Sweetgrass Development Corporation, is a private, non-profit corporation created to support economic development in the North Central Montana counties of Glacier, Cascade, Pondera, Teton and Toole and the Blackfeet Nation. Sweetgrass Development was designated North Central Montana's economic development district by the U. S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 2004.

Districts must create a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) document and update it every five years to qualify for EDA assistance under its Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs. This CEDS was developed with broad participation from leaders and citizens of the region and documents the ongoing planning efforts by Sweetgrass Development.

Sweetgrass Development conducted a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) in June 2016 which included public listening sessions in seven of its largest communities. The sessions were a key element in developing the CEDS, as a way to gather the perspectives of local citizens, businesses, organizations, and government entities. The sessions provided the opportunity to verify and gain additional insight into the economic and social climate of the area. Each session generated a wealth of feedback on the opportunities and obstacles of creating a stable and prosperous economy.

The SWOT analysis revealed economic strengths of the region including a stable agricultural economic base, strong road and rail transportation systems, ample local infrastructure and proximity to Glacier National Park. Weaknesses include challenges recruiting and retaining skilled workers, lack of workforce housing, limited value-added agriculture and a need for economic diversification. Employers and community leaders are concerned with the aging workforce and the fact few young people that are returning to replace workers when they retire.

In response to the current conditions of the region, Sweetgrass Development intends to work diligently to support economic diversification, to bring a broader array of opportunities to individuals and will make the economy more resilient. Sweetgrass will explore ways to increase high-wage service sector jobs and value-added agriculture enterprises to the region. Developing support systems for current and potential entrepreneurs, continues to be a primary focus. Providing entrepreneurs with the knowledge and financial resources to create and sustain strong businesses is paramount. A concerted effort to develop resources for the workforce such as housing, childcare, training, mental health assistance and addiction services will continue to be crucial to attracting and retaining available workforce for area employers.

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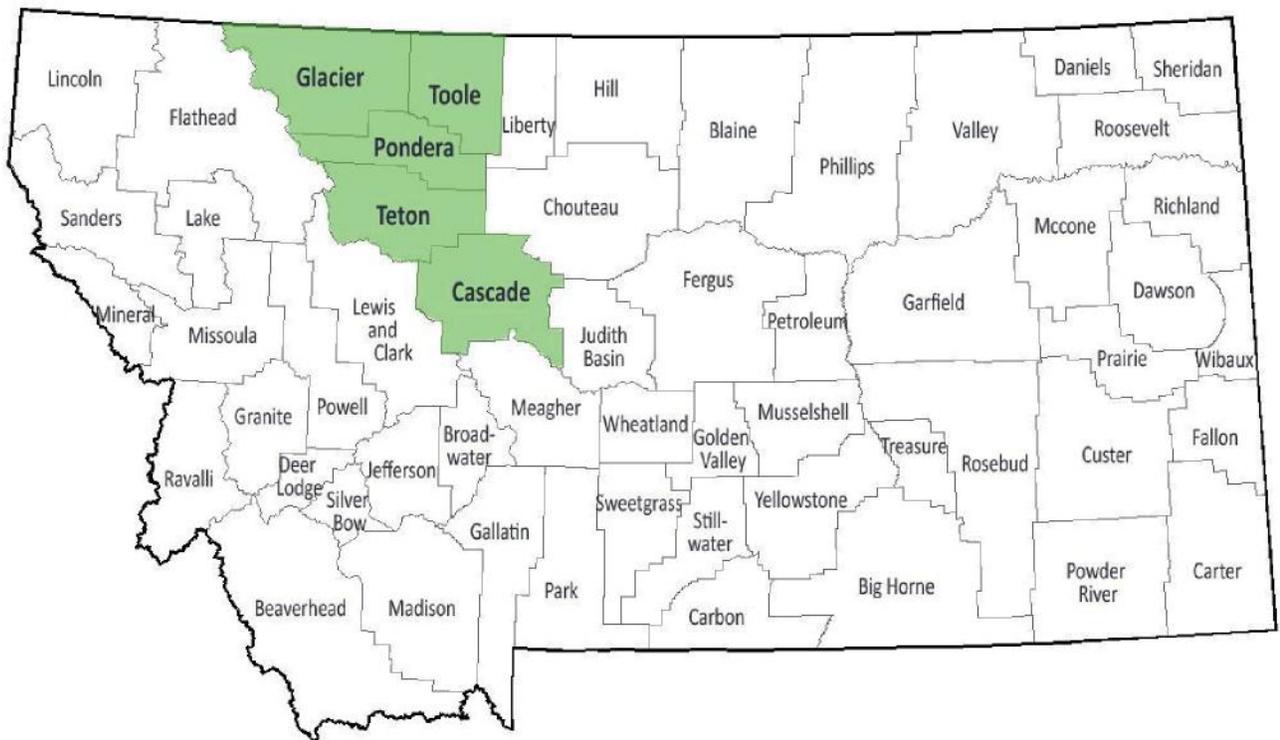
OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Geography

The Sweetgrass Region lies in the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front, which stretches along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains from the Canadian Border south, approximately 110 miles. Farms in the eastern part of the region give way to ranches in the rolling hills and mountains on the western edge of the region. Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountain Front mark the western edge of the Region.

With the exception of Great Falls, the Sweetgrass Region consists of thinly populated, rural areas where a large percentage of land is dedicated to ranching, farming and businesses supporting the agriculture industry. The region contains the Golden Triangle, which is renowned for world class wheat and barley production.

Montana is sparsely populated with just over a million people. Large trading centers within the state are Billings, 220 miles from Great Falls, Missoula, 170 miles from Great Falls and Bozeman which is 180 miles from Great Falls.



Infrastructure and Transportation

The Sweetgrass Region is relatively isolated from major metropolitan areas and the trade opportunities they offer. However, transportation routes crisscross the region and most communities listed strong transportation routes as a strength of their area during input sessions. Access to Interstate 15, Highway

2, the railway and the airport at Great Falls were seen as strong assets for the region. Even so, any products produced in the area must be transported a long distance to market which adds cost, time delay and logistical challenges.

The nearest large commercial trading centers, with populations over 200,000 are: Calgary, Alberta to the north (322 miles from Great Falls); Spokane, Washington to the west (400 miles) and Seattle (679 miles); Minneapolis, Minnesota to the east (972 miles). Markets to the south are: Boise, Idaho (637 miles); Salt Lake City, Utah (570 miles); and Denver, Colorado (772 miles).



Airports

Efforts at improving job opportunities within the Sweetgrass Region must focus on maintaining and improving the ways business owners can connect with suppliers and customers outside the region because of the region's small population. Besides road travel, access to markets can be accomplished via rail and air travel.

Three out of the five counties (Glacier, Toole and Pondera) in the Sweetgrass Region are rural and isolated, far from cities and from commercial airports that can readily transport people to large population centers. Cascade and Teton counties, in contrast, have the majority of their population within an hour's drive of the Great Falls airport. For Glacier, Toole and Pondera counties, the prospects of attracting telecommuters or remote workers in knowledge-based sectors, is limited. For Great Falls and the towns of Fairfield and Choteau, this form of economic development is a more likely option.

Rail

The following map shows the various railways connecting the Sweetgrass Region to other population centers. Used largely for the shipping of grain, these railroad connections are vital to the agriculture industry in the region.

Great Falls and Shelby have the advantage of being located at the intersection of railroads and highways. For Shelby, thousands of railcars and semi-trucks pass through the area daily which presented the opportunity to create a transportation hub which has successfully diversified the economy beyond its historical dependence on agriculture and petroleum.



Demographics and Socioeconomic Data

Population

The size of the population in the region is fairly stable or increasing slightly overall. Population growth is concentrated in two areas while the majority of the region experienced a drop in population. There were 113,088 people in the region in 2014 which is up 1.2% from the 2000 total of 111,740. Population growth was concentrated in Glacier County (+3.0%) and Cascade County (+2.0%). The remaining three counties saw decreases in population ranging from -1.1 percent (Toole County) to -5.7 percent (Teton County) between 2014 and 2000. For details see Appendix B, Population Percent Change.

The population in most areas of the Region is aging faster than the rest of the country. Between 2000 and 2014, the median age, where half the people are younger and half are older, increased in each county. The median age estimate increased the most in Teton County (40-44.9 years, a 12.3% increase) and increased the least in Glacier County (30.6 to 31 years, a 1.3% increase). For details see Appendix C: Age and Gender Distribution and Change.

The data shows that the working population in the region is either shrinking or growing slowly. The age group with the highest estimated increase in size is the 45-64 year category which will soon be leaving the workforce. The future of the region's workforce, the under 18 age category, is also shrinking which is a cause for concern for the future viability of the economy.

Income

Per capita income in 2014 is lower throughout the region than in the United States as a whole. Per capita income ranged from a low of \$16,710 in Glacier County to a high of \$25,216 in Cascade County compared to \$28,555 in the U.S. In the 2009-2014 period, household incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,999 were the most common in the region at 18.7% of households. The income category with the fewest households in the region was \$150,000 to \$199,999 (2.1% of households). For details see Appendix D: Household Income.

Poverty

The region has slightly higher percentages of individuals and families living in poverty compared to the United States as a whole. In 2014, 16.9 percent of individuals and 12.1 percent of families were estimated to be living below the poverty line compared to 15.6 percent of individuals and 11.5 percent of families in the United States. Poverty was concentrated in Glacier County which had nearly twice the rate of poverty as the region as a whole (32.7%).

Concern for high levels of poverty were not commonly discussed during this year's input sessions as they were during the previous CEDS input sessions with the exception of the session at the Blackfeet Community College where poverty and the symptoms of poverty were a great concern. For details see Appendix E: Poverty.

Unemployment Rates

Unemployment for the Region overall was 4.5 percent compared to 5.3 percent in the U.S. In 2015, Glacier County had the highest unemployment rate in the region (9%), and Toole County had the lowest (3.4%). For details see Appendix F: Unemployment Rates.

Education

Educational attainment in the Sweetgrass Region tends to be slightly lower than the nation as a whole. In 2014, 9.9 percent of people in the Sweetgrass Region didn't have a high school diploma and 23.8 percent had a bachelor's degree or greater compared to 13.7 percent and 29.3 percent respectively in the United States. Cascade County had the highest percentage of people with a bachelor's degree at 25.5 percent. Glacier County had the highest percentage of people with no high school diploma (15.7%) and the lowest with a bachelor's degree or higher (18.3%). For details see Appendix G: Education.

The Sweetgrass Region is home to Great Falls Montana State University, University of Great Falls and the Blackfeet Community College in Browning. Park University has a location on Malmstrom Air Force Base. In addition, the Manpower programs assists with training on the Blackfeet Reservation.

Race and Culture

The region is mostly Caucasian, with a smaller percentage Native American population. Glacier County, home to the Blackfeet Nation, had the highest percentage of the population that identified as “American Indian alone”, at 64 percent. The racial group with the highest estimated percent of the population in the region in 2014 were people who identify as “White alone” at 83 percent of the population followed by “American Indian alone” at 12 percent. Other categories of race made up insignificant percentages of the population in all counties except the “Black or African American alone” category in Cascade County at 1.3 percent of the county.

In Glacier County, only 33 percent of the population identify as “White alone” which was the lowest in this category for the region. In the other four counties of the region, the percentage identifying as “American Indian alone” was much lower, ranging from 1.8 percent in Teton County to 14.2 percent in Pondera County. For more details on Race and Culture see Appendix H: Culture.

Employment by Industry

Over time, total employment in the region has grown and the mix of industries has changed. Agriculture continues to be an important economic base for the region, though the number of jobs in agriculture has shrunk. Jobs in services have increased while manufacturing and government jobs have decreased. For more details see Appendix I: Employment by Industry.

Service sector is an important sector of employment with an opportunity for high wage jobs, however, jobs in the Sweetgrass Region were more likely to be in the lower paying sections of the service industry in 2015. Sixty-eight percent of jobs in the Sweetgrass Region were concentrated in the service sector. The three sectors of the service industry that employed the highest proportion of people in the Region were trade, transportation, utilities (21.1% of total jobs), education & health (16.1% of total jobs), and leisure and hospitality (13.4% of total jobs). However, the three sectors of the service industry that paid the highest wages in the region in 2015 were financial activities (\$52,069), professional and business (\$44,328), and education and health (\$40,932). For more details see Appendix J: Average Annual Wages and Jobs in Service Sectors.

The primary agriculture products grown in this region are oilseed, small grains and beef ranching. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis as reported by Headwaters Economics, 5.3 percent of total employment was based on farming in 2014. The number of jobs in agriculture has shrunk in recent decades, leaving mostly the owners of the establishments working in the industry. In 1970, farm proprietors represented 70.4 percent of all farm employment. By 2014, farm proprietors represented 79.5 percent of all farm employment. For more details see Appendix K: Agriculture.

The percent of total jobs represented by tourism in the region has remained fairly stable over the past decade at around 19-20 percent. Glacier County had the highest percentage of jobs in the tourism industry, followed by Toole County. The U.S. had the lowest percentage of jobs in this industry. For more details on Tourism see Appendix L.

Housing

Availability of quality workforce housing was a concern across the region. In many communities, finding suitable housing for young, working families was a challenge. A lack of available housing for workforce was seen as negatively affecting the availability of workforce. Housing data shows that available housing grew by a small percentage or declined across the region. For more details on Housing see Appendix M.

Public Lands

Much of the land on the western edge of the Sweetgrass Region is public land, managed by the USDA Forest Service and the U.S. National Park Service. These public lands contain approximately 1.5 million acres of designated wilderness that includes the Bob Marshall, Great Bear and Scapegoat Wilderness areas. The conservation groups The Nature Conservancy and the Boone and Crockett Club manage private wildlife reserves in the area.

The Rocky Mountain Front is a mineral rich area which contains what geologists call the Montana Thrust Belt, a formation that contains potentially recoverable oil and gas. The potential to develop this resource has long been a source of political tension in the region which continues today. Efforts to protect the Rocky Mountain Front date back to 1947, when the Montana state legislature designated the Sun River Game Preserve. The Bob Marshall Wilderness was created by Congress in 1964. It was later expanded and today covers over a million acres.

Environment

This region is home to a vast amount of diverse species, natural habitat and landscape. A considerable amount of arable land in the Sweetgrass Region is enrolled in the Federal Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP. This is a voluntary program, administered by the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), which pays landowners for taking farmland out of production and planting cover crops.

The Sweetgrass Development Region falls into two state watershed areas, the Upper and Lower Missouri watersheds. There are nearly 230 miles of the Missouri within Cascade County, on which many of the state parks and recreation areas are situated.

This region has numerous brownfields sites that are ripe for redevelopment. Brownfields sites include leaking underground storage tank sites, meth contaminated properties, toxic and chemical related spills.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis is a tool used in the CEDS process to identify the advantages of the region that will make it competitive in the regional, national or global scale. The process also identifies factors that might limit the region's ability to realize its potential. Sweetgrass Development held seven input sessions around the region in June 2016, to gather feedback from local leaders and citizens on their perception of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the area. The sessions began with a brief survey and followed up with a more in-depth discussion. The survey results are discussed in this summary and more detailed information about the discussion portion of the sessions can be found in Appendix N and O.

In the input sessions, the SWOT analysis model was followed in spirit, but some terms were substituted in an effort to make the concepts more relatable to the local population. To understand local opinions about the strengths of their area, participants were asked about "assets" and the "greatest economic strengths" of the local community. It was explained that assets are things on which to build further economic development for the region. Nearly half of those answering the survey identified the agriculture base of the area as the "greatest asset" of the region followed by the education system. When asked about the "greatest economic strength" of the area, participants chose location and the agricultural base. Though strong leadership was identified during the discussion portion of the input sessions, few selected leadership in the survey as the greatest strength or asset. Very few identified transportation, cost of living or military presence as the "greatest asset" or "economic strength" in the survey, though during the discussion, these things were frequently included as strengths or assets of the area.

The term "weakness" in the traditional SWOT analysis was substituted by the term "need". In our discussions throughout the region, we asked people what needed to be improved, regionally, in order to build a strong foundation to a strong economic future. In the survey, approximately half of participants identified economic diversification as the greatest need, followed by affordable housing. These thoughts were echoed in the discussions of the issues. Access to capital and infrastructure were not included as the greatest need in the survey, though these issues were concerns expressed during the discussions.

Instead of using "opportunities" as in a traditional SWOT, we asked participants which sectors or industries had the greatest growth potential for the area. The leading answers in the survey were manufacturing and technology. In an interesting twist, agriculture ranked the lowest for greatest potential for the region. During the discussions, one of the most frequently identified opportunities was value-added agriculture which was not included in the survey.

Threats were not specifically identified in the survey, but during the discussion portion of the input sessions, threats were discussed though we asked people what they thought were the greatest challenges to achieving their vision for the future instead of the term "threats." The most commonly identified challenge to the region is the lack of younger, skilled workers coming back into the region to replace the older workforce. A lack of social amenities, workforce housing, educational opportunities for adults further compounded the problem of attracting younger workers back to the area. Communication and collaboration among groups and between governmental organizations was also identified as a threat to future growth.

STRATEGIC DIRECTION: VISION, GOALS, OBJECTIVES

Vision Statement: Sweetgrass Development's vision is to provide leadership, direction and assistance to local leaders and citizens in Teton, Glacier, Pondera, Toole and Cascade counties as well as the Blackfeet Nation. Sweetgrass will assist with planning, development and implementation projects that will improve the economic and social well-being of the region through development, conservation and proper use of our natural and human assets.

Goals and Objectives: The following goals, objectives and strategies are the focus of Sweetgrass Development in the next five years based on the input sessions held in June 2016.

Goal 1: Assist the region with community and economic development projects.

Objective 1: Facilitate communication among government and nonprofit entities.

Strategy 1: Conduct meetings throughout the region for purposes of discussion and coordinating economic and community development activities.

Strategy 2: Support local leadership program to increase the skills of local leaders and to increase the number of citizens who have the skill set to take on leadership positions.

Strategy 3: Support a community-wide civic dialog program to increase the level of trust among community members in an effort to increase effectiveness of local governments.

Objective 2: Assist with legislative efforts of local government and nonprofit organizations.

Strategy 1: Work with State and Federal leadership to maintain funding for maintenance and improvements to vital transportation routes to larger markets and within the region.

Strategy 2: Work with State elected leadership as well as state association partners to continue authorization and appropriation of programs and funding for community and economic development.

Strategy 3: Maintain communications with NADO to support and follow programs, funding and legislation on a national level.

Objective 3: Assist local governments with securing improvements to infrastructure through identifying needs, grant writing, and project management.

Strategy 1: Attend local needs assessment hearings and meetings involving project development. Provide letters of support, grant writing and technical assistance as requested.

Objective 4: Support efforts to develop main streets in communities across the region in an effort to enhance quality of life for younger workers, to retain and expand vital services for other businesses and to cultivate additional tourist attractions.

Strategy 1: Support participation in the Montana Main Street program at the local level.

Strategy 2: Support downtown development activities.

Strategy 3: Assist communities in addressing absentee landowner blighted properties by writing grants for redevelopment and planning.

Objective 5: Support maintenance and expansion of transportation infrastructure.

Strategy 1: Attend regional transportation meetings with local entities and the Montana Department of Transportation to continue the improvement of transportation lines within the region.

Strategy 2: Cooperate with the Northern Transit Interlocal to continue the improvement of public transportation system within the region.

Objective 6: Strengthen high-speed internet in the region.

Strategy 1: Continue to support efforts of local cooperatives and other entities to provide additional/increased service.

Strategy 2: Participate in meetings, trainings, workshops and conferences regarding fiber to the home and other technological upgrades.

Goal 2: Assist in creation, expansion and retention of private businesses.

Objective 1: Continue to develop and expand revolving loan funds in order to provide capital to new business ventures in the region.

Strategy 1: Create a web page and brochure to market the RLF.

Strategy 2: Work with local lenders and development organizations to utilize funds.

Strategy 3: Continue to apply for funding to increase the capacity of the loan fund and diversify through difference agencies and programs.

Objective 2: Provide technical assistance to local business owners with regard to starting, retaining and expanding local businesses.

Strategy 1: Work with local organizations to provide small business development training and education throughout the region.

Strategy 2: Provide coordination assistance for business development

Objective 3: Support development of value-added agriculture manufacturing enterprises.

Strategy 1: Provide technical assistance for project development and funding.

Strategy 2: Attend agricultural based conferences, meetings and conventions.

Goal 3: Strengthen and support workforce development.

Objective 1: Seek ways to network, support and partner with other organizations working on workforce development including but not limited to post-secondary educational institutions, economic development organizations, community non-profits, associations and private business.

Strategy 1: Attend trainings, meetings and seminars for workforce development.

Strategy 2: Support local and regional and statewide comprehensive workforce development efforts.

Objective 2: Participate in the statewide effort to support median housing development.

Strategy 1: Create local housing inventories.

Strategy 2: Provide information to local entities regarding programs and funding opportunities.

Strategy 3: Attend housing seminars for rental and development of median income housing opportunities.

Objective 3: Increase distance learning and develop detailed public/private training opportunities.

Strategy 1: Partner with other organizations to host a distance education fair in the region. Invite Montana higher education institutions and others who currently offer distance education in the region.

Strategy 2: Develop educational page on the sweetgrassdevelopment.org website to link to all of the opportunities available for distance learning and workforce training.

Objective 4: Lead initiative to support and retain newcomers that move to the region.

Strategy 1: Commission data analysis of in and out migration to the area so that local leaders can have a better understanding of actual migration activity.

Strategy 2: Find and share ways other rural areas have successfully supported and retained newcomers.

Goal 4: Develop and maintain a positive quality of life for citizens and visitors.

Objective 1: Support redevelopment efforts of blighted and abandoned properties.

Strategy 1: Continue Brownfields programs through EPA for assessment and clean-up of property. Continue to work with Montana Department of Environmental Quality on properties and areas identified.

Strategy 2: Apply for RLF clean-up funds through EPA and additional assessment funding as needed.

Objective 2: Support local initiatives to develop tourism plans or projects that maximize the opportunity presented by Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountain Front.

Strategy 1: Support application efforts of local entities through letters of support and other assistance as requested.

Strategy 2: Provide information regarding funding opportunities for tourism efforts.

Strategy 3: Develop cultural and place based tourism opportunities throughout the region.

Objective 3: Assist with promotion and development of walking trails in the region.

Strategy 1: Develop a region-wide map featuring the local walking trails for use by locals and visitors.

Strategy 2: Link the information to websites throughout the region and state.

Strategy 3: Create QR code and App for devices linked to regional walking trail map.

Objective 4: Support cultural tourism initiatives that would increase the ability of the region to take advantage of the national trend towards cultural tourism.

Strategy 1: Develop a comprehensive list of possible place based, cultural and eco tourism activities to market to visitors.

Strategy 2: Assist in the development of a “Path to Glacier Park” route that encompasses the place based activities.

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The goals in this CEDS were identified through the input sessions held throughout the county in June 2016 and through review of our previous CEDS and discussion with leaders throughout the region. Under each goal, evaluation considerations are listed. These criteria will be addressed by the Sweetgrass Development board throughout the timeframe of this CEDS to gauge progress.

Performance measures: What follows are the performance measures that will be used by Sweetgrass Development to evaluate its successful development and implementation of the CEDS.

- A. Number of jobs created.
- B. Number and types of investments undertaken in the region.
- C. Number of jobs retained in the region.
- D. Amount of private sector investment in the region.
- E. Changes in the economic environment of the region.

The performance measures used to evaluate each goal is identified by the letter from the list above.

Goal I: Assist the region with community development.

Performance Measures: C and E. Sweetgrass Development will 1) Facilitate communication among government and nonprofit entities; 2) Assist with legislative efforts of local government and nonprofit organizations; 3) Assist local governments with securing improvements to infrastructure through identifying needs, grant writing, and project management; 4) Support efforts to develop main streets in communities across the region in an effort to enhance quality of life for younger workers, to retain and expand vital services for other businesses and to cultivate additional tourist attractions; 5) Support maintenance and expansion of transportation infrastructure; 7) Strengthen high-speed internet in the region

Goal 2: Assist in creation, expansion and retention of private businesses.

Performance Measures: A, B, D and E. Sweetgrass Development will 1) Continue development and maintain a revolving loan fund; 2) Provide technical assistance to local business owners with regard to starting, retaining and expanding local businesses; 3) Support development of value-added agriculture manufacturing enterprises.

Goal 3: Strengthen and support workforce development.

Performance Measures: A, B, C, D and E. Sweetgrass Development will 1) Attend meetings in the region outside of economic development, addressing workforce development issues such as mental health, addiction and law enforcement to find ways to partner; 2) Participate in the statewide effort to

support median housing development; 3) Increase distance learning and develop detailed public/private training opportunities; 4) Lead initiative to support and retain newcomers that move to the region. Include innovative strategies from other areas on retaining newcomers that local communities can easily implement to keep those who do settle there.

Goal 4: Develop and maintain a positive quality of life for citizens and visitors

Performance Measures: C and E. Sweetgrass Development will 1) Support redevelopment efforts of blighted and abandoned properties; 2) Support local initiatives to develop tourism plans or projects that maximize the opportunity presented by Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountain Front; 3) Assist with promotion and development of walking trails in the region; 4) Support cultural tourism initiatives that would increase the ability of the region to take advantage of the national trend towards cultural tourism.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCY

A region's ability to withstand and recover from major disruptions has been proven to have a direct link to a region's long-term economic prosperity. Economic development organizations such as Sweetgrass Development typically play a key role in recovery when a disaster hits so bolstering a region's ability to recover quickly from a shock, to withstand a shock and to avoid it altogether is important to consider. Anticipating possible risks is a way that a region and an economic development organization can be ready.

Sweetgrass Development has created a plan outlining its role in both pre and post disaster planning and recovery which can be found in Appendix P. Other vexing challenges and deficiencies facing the region were identified during the CEDS input sessions and will be discussed in more detail here as they the potential to cause a major disruption in the region and impact its ability to be economically resilient. The goals, objectives and action plan developed as part of this CEDS is intended to prepare Sweetgrass to avoid and withstand these shocks if they should come to fruition.

One of the most commonly identified threats to economic growth and stability in the Sweetgrass Region is the lack of younger people coming back into the region. Without younger people coming to replace the older workforce and volunteer base, many identified opportunities will be difficult to achieve and could cause a significant and long-term disruption in the economy. This concern about lack of youth was identified as a particular concern by attendees in Great Falls, Conrad, Choteau, Cut Bank and the Sweetgrass Board.

A lack of social amenities was identified as a challenge to recruiting and retaining skilled and younger workers. Retail shopping across the region is limited because businesses struggle to survive with so much online shopping and the ease of traveling to Great Falls for shopping. New housing developments suitable for younger workforce are lacking and is perceived to have a negative impact on workforce. Attendees in Shelby have observed how important healthy food and healthy activities are to today's young families and these opportunities are lacking in the area. Without social amenities, recruiting and retaining a younger workforce will be a challenge.

A lack of skilled workforce threatens to disrupt the growth and development of individual companies and was identified as a threat in Browning and Conrad in particular. In Great Falls, groups are not currently working together on a comprehensive solution to the workforce issue as in other communities such as Billings. Without collaboration, attendees agreed that workforce will be a threat to the future health of the economy.

An inability of local entities to work collaboratively was identified as a significant challenge throughout the region. Collaboration among government and nonprofit entities is necessary to use limited resources in the most efficient way and enables communities to react quickly to a disaster or emergency. In Cut Bank, participants of the CEDS input sessions identified a challenge in working between the eastern and western parts of the county. In Browning, without some cohesion among the various governmental and nongovernmental organizations, achieving some of the identified goals will be difficult. In Choteau, communications between local, county and state governments was identified as a potential challenge to

achieving future goals. The Sweetgrass Development board recognized that the diversity of the needs and opportunities throughout the region contributes to the difficulty in collaboration.

The lack of financial resources was identified as a risk to the region in several ways. The region is heavily dependent on federal funding for achieving many of its goals. In Browning, they identified an overreliance on Federal funding for normal operating expenses of key programs. If access to Federal funds is cut or unavailable, the community would experience a significant disruption in local services. In Shelby, they felt that a lack of Federal funding would halt their ability to make the infrastructure improvements they feel is so critical to their future success. The Sweetgrass board said that fewer grant opportunities is a threat to achieving many of the goals set forth for the organization. Accessing private capital for value-added ag and other business ventures is a potential disruption of the growth of private industry in the region. Great Falls attendees recognized that the current tax base is not enough to sustain the infrastructure needed. This deferred maintenance is a threat to future growth.

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ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Sweetgrass Development board meets quarterly and the executive board meets monthly. Progress towards goals and objectives will be tracked monthly and will help focus the board and staff in their work in the region.

Goal I: Assist the region with community development.

Objective 1: Facilitate communication among government and nonprofit entities.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Conduct meetings throughout the region for purposes of discussion and coordinating economic and community development activities.	2		Local, SDC, State,		
	Support local leadership program to increase the skills of local leaders and to increase the number of citizens who have the skill set to take on leadership positions.	1				
	Support a community-wide civic dialog program to increase the level of trust among community members in an effort to increase effectiveness of local governments.	2				

Objective 2: Provide technical assistance to local business owners with regard to starting, retaining and expanding local businesses.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Work with State and Federal leadership to maintain funding for maintenance and improvements to vital transportation routes to larger markets and within the region.	1				
	Work with State elected leadership as well as state association partners to continue authorization and appropriation of programs and funding for community and economic development.	2				
	Maintain communications with NADO to support and follow programs, funding and legislation on a national level.	3				

Objective 3: Assist local governments with securing improvements to infrastructure through identifying needs, grant writing, and project management.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
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Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

	Attend local needs assessment hearings and meetings involving project development.					
	Provide letters of support, grant writing and technical assistance as requested.					

Objective 4: Support efforts to develop main streets in communities across the region in an effort to enhance quality of life for younger workers, to retain and expand vital services for other businesses and to cultivate additional tourist attractions.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Support participation in the Montana Main Street program at the local level.	2				
	Support downtown development activities.	3				
	Assist communities in addressing absentee landowner blighted properties by writing grants for redevelopment and planning.	1				

Objective 5: Support maintenance and expansion of transportation infrastructure.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Attend regional transportation meetings with local entities and the Montana Department of Transportation to continue the improvement of transportation lines within the region.	1				
	Cooperate with the Northern Transit Interlocal to continue the improvement of public transportation system within the region.	2				

Objective 6: Strengthen high-speed internet in the region.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Continue to support efforts of local cooperatives and other entities to provide additional / increased service.	1				
	Participate in meetings, trainings, workshops and conferences regarding fiber to the home	2				

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

	and other technological upgrades.					
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Goal 2: Assist in creation, expansion and retention of private businesses.

Objective 1: Continue to develop and expand revolving loan funds in order to provide capital to new business ventures in the region.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Create a web page and brochure to market the RLF.	2				
	Work with local lenders and development organizations to utilize funds.	3				
	Continue to apply for funding to increase the capacity of the loan fund and diversify through difference agencies and programs.	1				

Objective 2: Provide technical assistance to local business owners with regard to starting, retaining and expanding local businesses.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed

	Work with local governmental and nonprofit organizations to provide small business development training and education for local residents throughout the region.	1				
	Provide coordination assistance to current and prospective business owners on business development.					

Objective 3: Support development of value-added agriculture manufacturing enterprises.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Provide technical assistance for project development and funding.	1				
	Attend agricultural based conferences, meetings and conventions.	2				

Goal 3: Strengthen and support workforce development.

Objective 1: Seek ways to network with, support and partner with other organizations working on workforce development including but not limited to post-secondary educational institutions, economic development organizations, community non-profits, associations and private business.

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Attend trainings, meetings and seminars for workforce development.	2				
	Support local and regional and statewide comprehensive workforce development efforts.	1				

Objective 2: Participate in the statewide effort to support median housing development.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Create local housing inventories	1				
	Provide information to local entities regarding programs and funding opportunities.	2				
	Attend housing seminars for rental and development of median income housing opportunities.	3				

Objective 3: Increase distance learning and develop detailed public/private training opportunities.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Partner with other organizations to host a distance education fair in the region. Invite Montana higher education institutions and others who currently offer distance education in the region.	2				
	Develop educational page on the sweetgrassdevelopment.org website to link to all of the opportunities available for distance learning and workforce training.	1				

Objective 4: Lead initiative to support and retain newcomers that move to the region.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Commission data analysis of in and out migration to the area so that local leaders can have a better understanding of actual	1				

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

	migration activity.					
	Find and share ways other rural areas have successfully supported and retained newcomers.	2				

Goal 4: Develop and maintain a positive quality of life for citizens and visitors.

Objective 1: Support redevelopment efforts for blighted and abandoned properties.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Support redevelopment efforts of blighted and abandoned properties.	3				
	Continue Brownfields programs through EPA for assessment and clean-up of property. Continue to work with Montana Department of Environmental Quality on properties and areas identified.	1				
	Apply for RLF clean-up funds through EPA and additional assessment funding as needed.	2				

Objective 2: Support local initiatives to develop tourism plans or projects that maximize the opportunity presented by Glacier National Park and the Rocky Mountain Front.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Support application efforts of local entities through letters of support, assist as requested.	2				
	Provide information regarding funding opportunities for tourism efforts.	1				
	Develop cultural and placed based tourism opportunities throughout the region.	3				

Objective 3: Assist with promotion and development of walking trails in the region.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Develop a region-wide map featuring the local walking trails for use by locals and locals.	1				
	Link the information to websites throughout the region and state.	2				

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

	Create QR code and App for devices linked to the regional walking trail map.	3				
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Objective 4: Support cultural tourism initiatives that would increase the ability of the region to take advantage of the national trend towards cultural tourism.

County	Strategy	Priority	Project Partners	Funding Source (if necessary)	Begin Date	Date Completed
	Develop a comprehensive list of possible place based, cultural and eco- tourism activities to market to visitors.	1				
	Assist in the development of a “Path to Glacier Park” route that encompasses the place based activities.	2				

APPENDIX

Appendix A: Sweetgrass Development Board

1. Government Representatives (51%+)

Name	Government	Position
Mike Henning	Town of Fairfield	Council member, appt by Mayor
Jim Larson	Cascade County	Commissioner
Larry Bonderud	City of Shelby	Mayor
Gerald Wagner	Blackfeet Tribe	Appointed by Tribal Council
Jim Hodgskiss	Teton County	Commissioner
Lorette Carter	City of Shelby (per the mayor)	City Development Coordinator
Deb Brandon	Toole County	Commissioner
Sandy Broesder	Pondera County	Commissioner
Llew Jones	State of Montana	Senator
Tom McKay	Glacier County	Commissioner

2. Non-Government Representatives (up to 49%)

Name	Company/Enterprise	Position
Lila Evans	B and L Pumping	Owner
Cynthia Johnson	Desert Claim Farm	Owner
Brad Livingston	Gt Falls Chamber of Commerce	President
Mel Lehman	Broken Wagon Ranch	GF College MSU
Jason Gibson	Private Businessman	Private Businessman
Tony Sitzmann	Oil West Services	Private Business Owner
Vacant		

Calculations	Number	Percent
1. Government Representatives (51%+)	10	59%
2. Non-Government Representatives (up to 49%)	6	35%
Total Board Membership	17	94%

Sweetgrass Strategy Committee Roster

1. Private Sector Representatives (At least 51%)

Name	Company	Position
Lila Evans	B&L Pumping	Owner
Tony Sitzmann	Desert Claim Farm	Owner
Bev Widhalm	Conrad Tire	Owner
Harold Olsen	Olsen Drug – retired	Owner
Michael Bruch	Edward Jones	Owner
Ben Ruddy	Dutton State Bank	President
Ed Buttrey	Buttrey Realty	Owner
Larry Bonderud	Optometrist - private	Owner

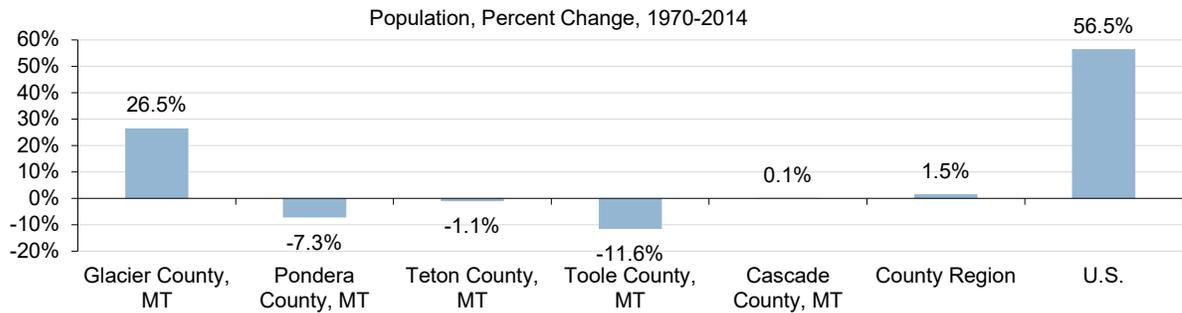
2. Representatives of other economic interests (No more than 49%)

Name	Company/Enterprise	Position
Deven Merrit	NETA/Toole County	Coordinator/Admin
Gerald Wagner	Blackfeet Environmental	Director
Joe Briggs	Cascade County	Commissioner
Wendy Judisch	City of Conrad	Mayor
Jack Conatser	City of Choteau	Mayor
Rob Cook	State of Montana	Representative

Calculations	Number	Percent
Private Sector Representatives (At Least 51%)	8	57%
Representatives of other Economic Interests (No more than 49%)	6	43%
Total Committee Membership	14	100%

Staffing: Staffing for the North Central Montana Economic Development District dba Sweetgrass Development consists of one full-time, salaried Executive Director, Sarah Converse and a contract with the Port of Northern Montana provides assistance with research and reporting. Ms. Converse and the contracted position each allot 75% of their time to CEDS related activities.

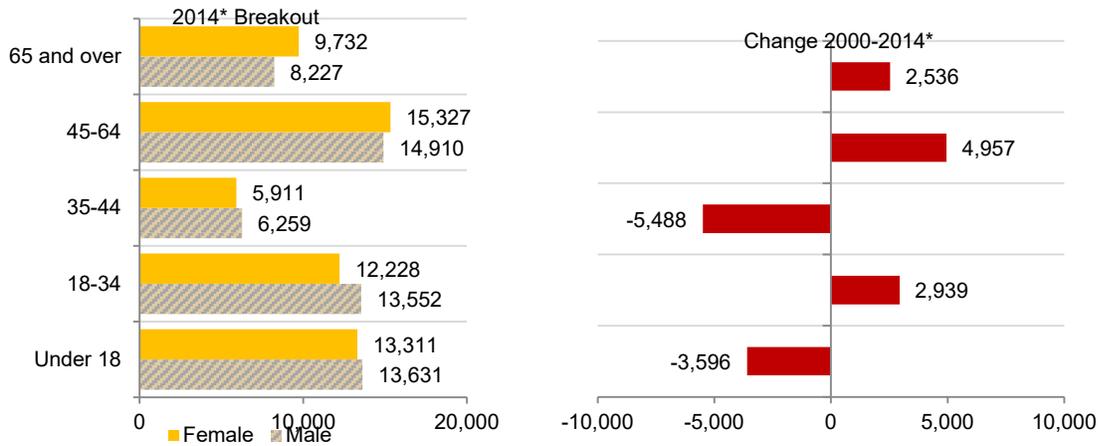
Appendix B: Population, Percent Change



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C.

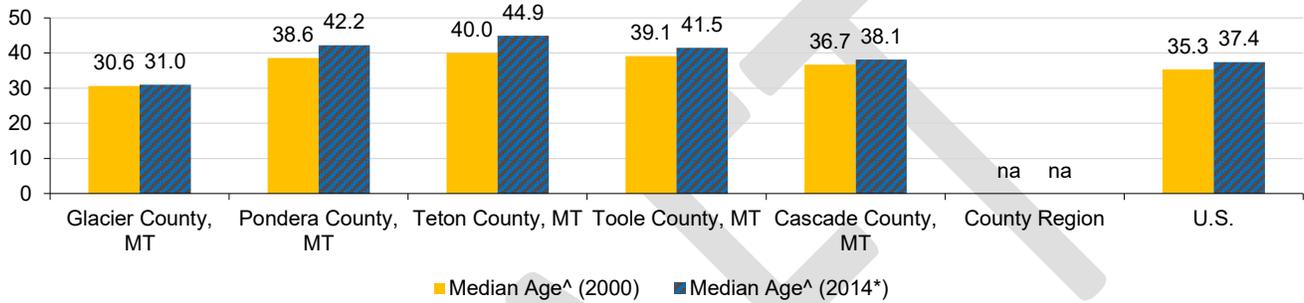
Appendix C: Age and Gender Distribution and Change

Age & Gender Distribution and Change, 2000-2014*



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2000. Census Bureau, Systems Support Division, Washington, D.C.

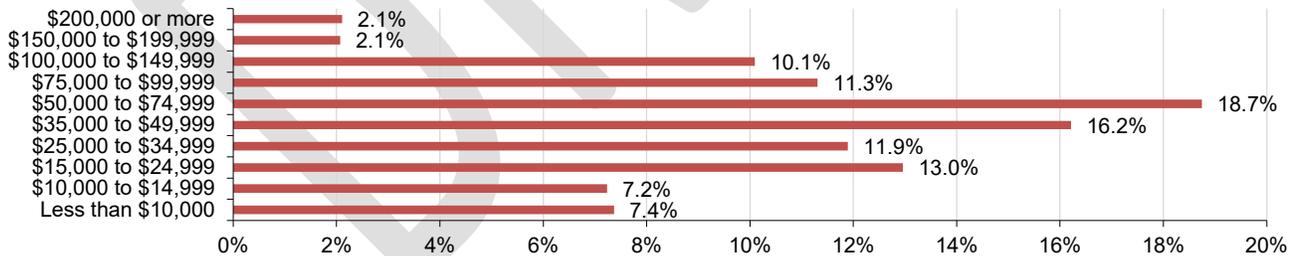
Median Age, 2000 & 2014



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2000. Census Bureau, Systems Support Division, Washington, D.C.

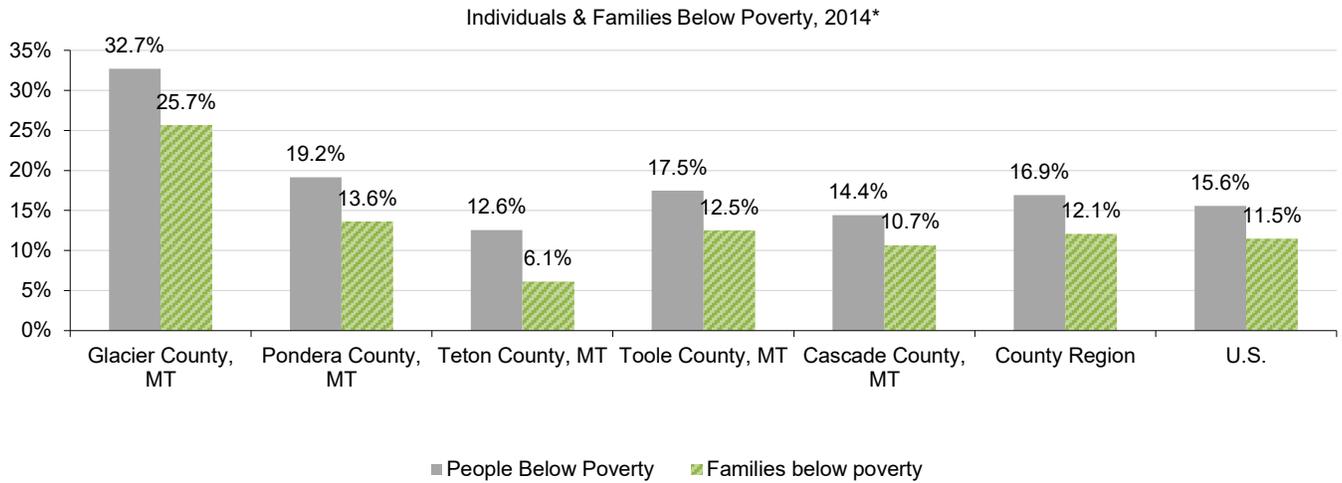
Appendix D: Household Income

Household Income Distribution, County Region, 2014*



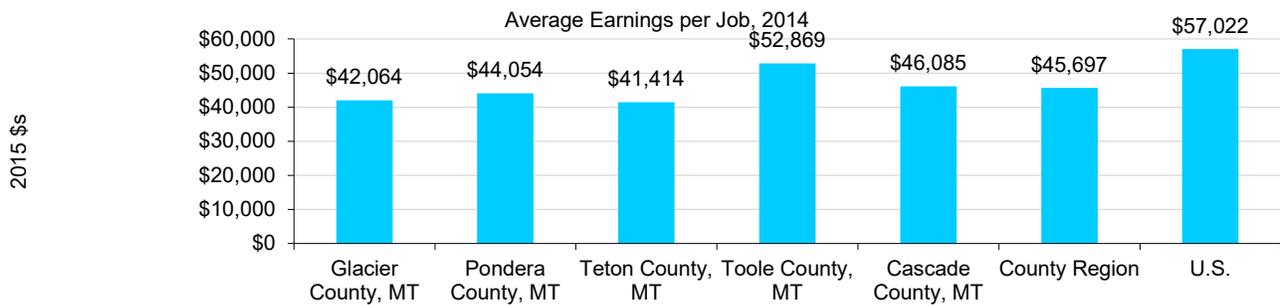
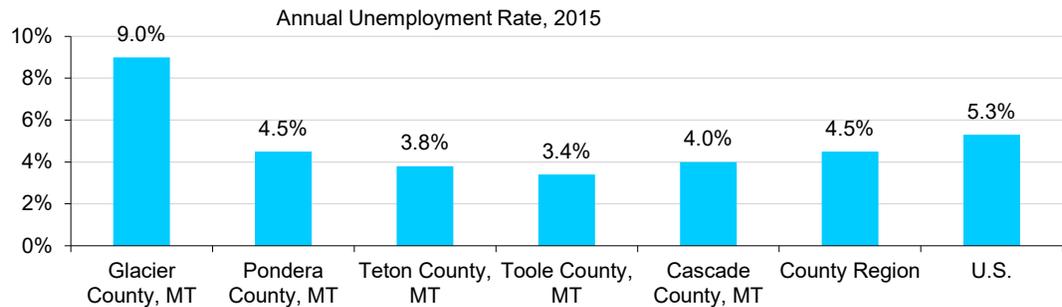
Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C.

Appendix E: Poverty



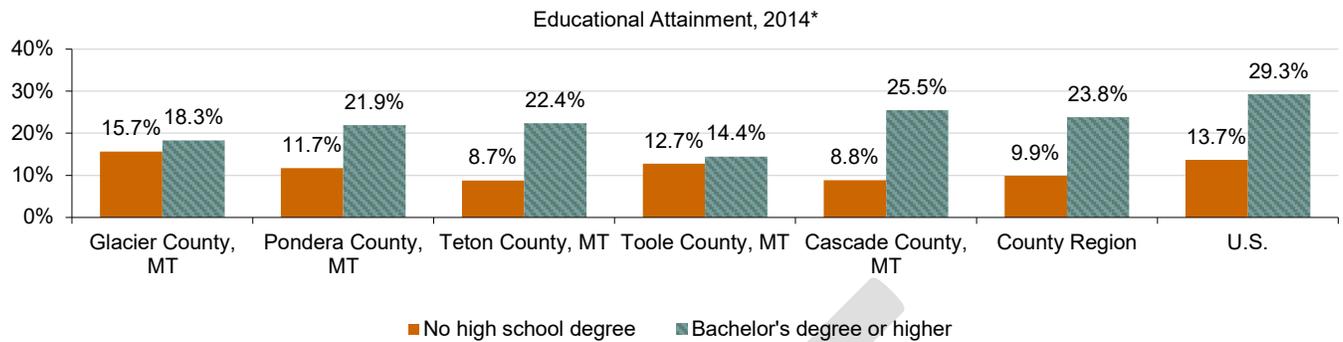
Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C..

Appendix F: Unemployment Rates



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Labor. 2016. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Washington, D.C.

Appendix G: Education



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System September 16, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Office, Washington, D.C.

Appendix H: Culture

The Blackfeet Tribe

The Blackfeet Nation brings a rich history and cultural diversity to the region. As with many tribes, a revitalization of tribal traditions and customs grew in the late twentieth century with education initiatives leading the way. The Blackfeet language and traditional cultural values are taught today through various programs at the elementary, secondary and community college level.

The reservation was established when part of what is now Glacier and Pondera counties were set aside as the Blackfeet Indian Reservation by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851. In 1896, the Blackfeet ceded the western portion of their reservation, which eventually became Glacier National Park.

In 1907 the Allotment Act allocated 302 acres to every tribal member. Some land was reserved for town sites (Browning and Babb) and the remainder was sold to white settlers. Tribal members were allowed to patent their land, though many did not understand the patenting process, and sold their land for very low prices.

By 1934 the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) allowed the tribe to form their own system of government, which resulted in, among other things, the creation of the Blackfeet Tribal Business Council which is still in existence today.

Tribal enrolled members currently living on the Blackfeet Reservation make up only 56 percent of the approximately 17,000 total enrolled tribal members.

The nine-member Blackfeet Tribal Business Council governs the Nation. The council is headquartered in Browning and includes elected members representing their districts on the reservation.

The reservation is home to a wide variety of private and tribally owned enterprises. Recent tribal ventures include the Glacier Family Foods grocery store, the Blackfeet Advanced Technologies manufacturing facility and a Holiday Inn Express hotel and casino as well as some technology oriented

businesses. Major employers on the reservation include the Blackfeet Tribe, Siyeh Development Corporation, Browning Public Schools, Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Blackfeet Housing Authority.

The Blackfeet Reservation has many natural resources which present economic opportunities such as tourism, oil and gas, minerals, and wind energy. The Blackfeet Community College, founded in 1976, is an asset to the community and provides educational opportunities for the residents in and around the Blackfeet Reservation to learn valuable skills in preparation for additional higher education and the workforce.

Hutterite Colonies

Montana is home to about 4,000 Hutterites and the Sweetgrass Region is home to approximately 23 Hutterite communities. Hutterites live in “colonies,” where property is commonly owned by the church and basic necessities are provided through a communal system of welfare. The colonies function as efficient, industrial agricultural operations. Each colony consists of a population of less than 200 individuals. Hutterites follow a branch of the Mennonite faith and their predominant language is a German dialect, although they also speak English.

Hutterites interact with the outside world to buy farm inputs such as fertilizer and equipment and to sell farm products. Hutterites are known for being religiously devoted, hard-working and productive. According to a 2014 Great Falls Tribune article, there are 50 Hutterite colonies in Montana and they produce 90 percent of Montana’s pork and 98 percent of its eggs. (Kristen Inbody Great Falls Tribune August 9, 2014).

Appendix I: Employment by Industry

Employment by Industry, 1970-2000

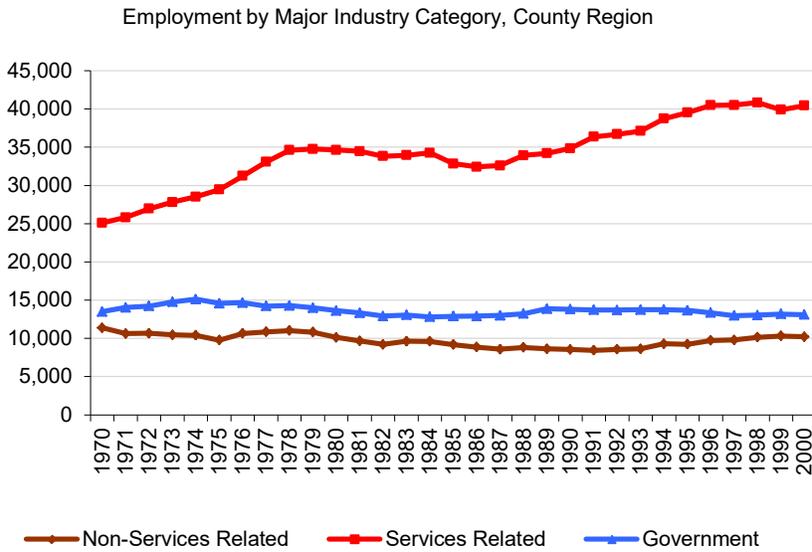
	1970	1980	1990	2000	Change 1990-2000
Total Employment (number of jobs)	49,974	58,365	57,196	63,567	6,371
Non-Services Related	11,379	10,117	8,553	10,216	1,663
Farm	4,452	3,528	3,332	3,567	235
Agricultural services, forestry, fishing & other	235	326	637	962	325
Mining (including fossil fuels)	679	1,255	654	521	-133
Construction	2,835	2,942	2,354	3,477	1,123
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	3,178	2,066	1,576	1,689	113
Services Related	25,095	34,631	34,830	40,441	5,611
Transportation & public utilities	2,869	3,111	2,933	3,100	167
Wholesale trade	2,038	4,021	2,868	2,410	-458
Retail trade	8,436	9,832	10,520	12,141	1,621
Finance, insurance & real estate	3,256	4,417	3,782	4,762	980
Services	8,496	13,250	14,727	18,028	3,301
Government	13,503	13,617	13,812	13,110	-702

Percent of Total

					% Change 1990-2000
Total Employment					11.1%
Non-Services Related	22.8%	17.3%	15.0%	16.1%	19.4%
Farm	8.9%	6.0%	5.8%	5.6%	7.1%
Agricultural services, forestry, fishing & other	0.5%	0.6%	1.1%	1.5%	51.0%
Mining (including fossil fuels)	1.4%	2.2%	1.1%	0.8%	-20.3%
Construction	5.7%	5.0%	4.1%	5.5%	47.7%
Manufacturing (incl. forest products)	6.4%	3.5%	2.8%	2.7%	7.2%
Services Related	50.2%	59.3%	60.9%	63.6%	16.1%
Transportation & public utilities	5.7%	5.3%	5.1%	4.9%	5.7%
Wholesale trade	4.1%	6.9%	5.0%	3.8%	-16.0%
Retail trade	16.9%	16.8%	18.4%	19.1%	15.4%
Finance, insurance & real estate	6.5%	7.6%	6.6%	7.5%	25.9%
Services	17.0%	22.7%	25.7%	28.4%	22.4%
Government	27.0%	23.3%	24.1%	20.6%	-5.1%

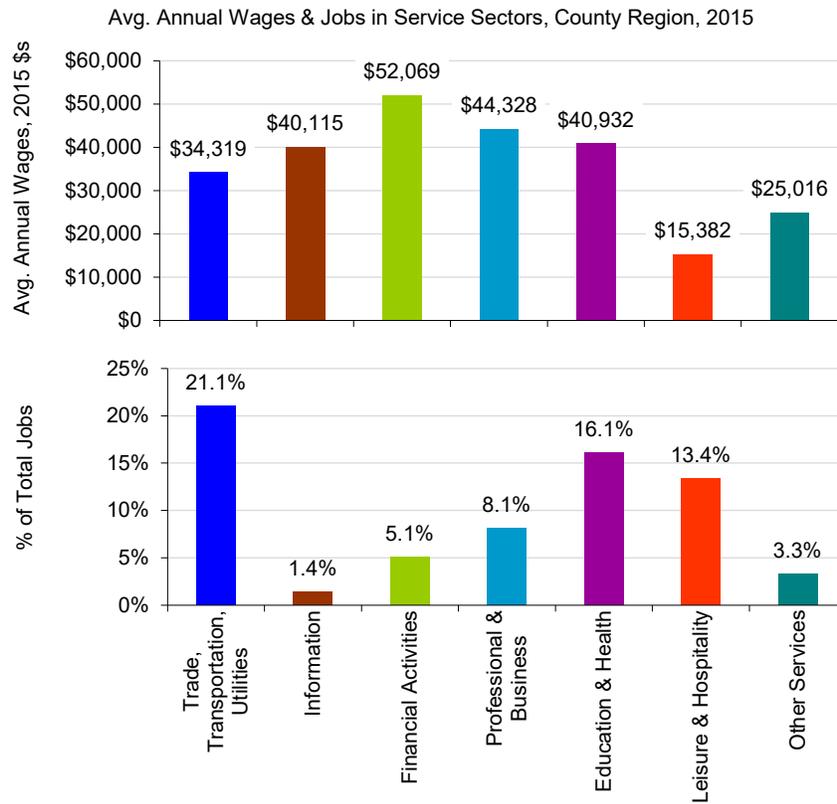
Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. The employment data above are organized according to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. The data end in 2000 because in 2001 the Bureau of Economic Analysis switched to organizing industry-level data according to the newer North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). More recent employment trends, organized by NAICS, are shown in subsequent sections of this report.

From 1970 to 2000, jobs in non-services related industries shrank from 11,379 to 10,216, a 10% decrease. From 1970 to 2000, jobs in services related industries grew from 25,095 to 40,441, a 61% increase. From 1970 to 2000, jobs in government shrank from 13,503 to 13,110, a 3% decrease.



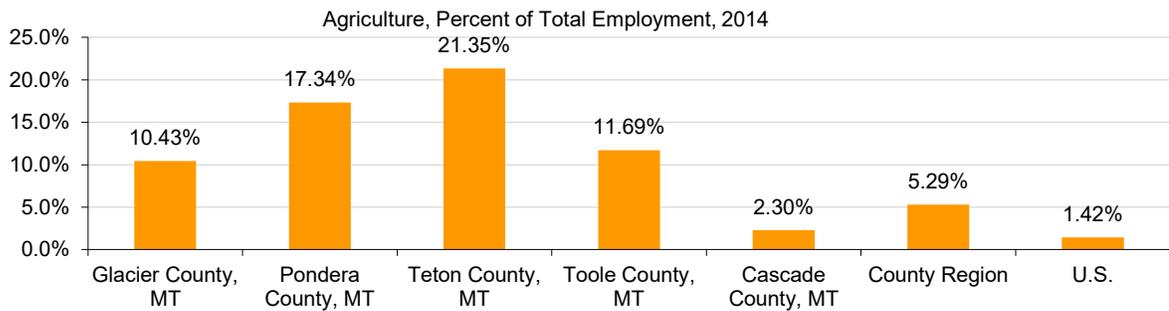
Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. The employment data above are organized according to the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) system. The data end in 2000 because in 2001 the Bureau of Economic Analysis switched to organizing industry-level data according to the newer North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS). More recent employment trends, organized by NAICS, are shown in subsequent sections of this report.

Appendix J: Annual Wages and Jobs in the Service Sector



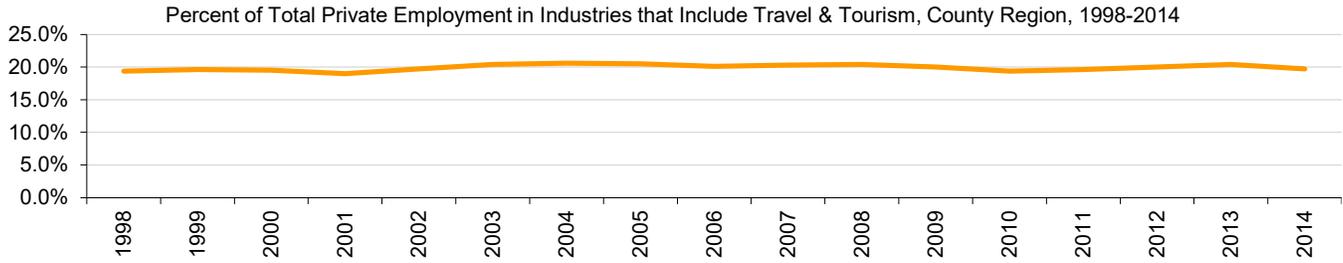
Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Labor. 2016. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Washington, D.C.

Appendix K: Agriculture

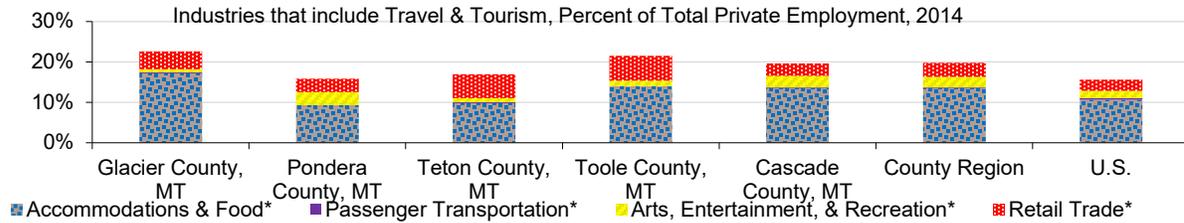


Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2016. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, Washington, D.C.

Appendix L: Tourism



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2016. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, Washington, D.C.



Data compiled and formatted by Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System October 23, 2016. Data Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2015. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Commerce. 2016. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, Washington, D.C.

In the community input sessions, Glacier County residents felt like they were not fully maximizing the opportunity presented by tourism due to the proximity to Glacier National Park. In Great Falls, the relative low vitality of the downtown compared to other downtowns in Montana was perceived as an opportunity for further development.

Appendix M: Housing

	Cascade County, Montana	Glacier County, Montana	Toole County, Montana	Pondera County, Montana	Teton County, Montana	Montana
Housing						
Housing units, July 1, 2015, (V2015)	37932	5314	2341	2634	2876	494198
Housing units, April 1, 2010	37276	5348	2336	2659	2892	482825
Percent change in housing units from 2010 to 2015	1.76	-0.64	0.21	-0.94	-0.55	2.36
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2010-2014	64.3	58.6	60.6	68.7	76.1	67.7
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2010-2014	159900	85800	107400	105800	135600	187600
Median gross rent, 2010-2014	629	465	544	564	552	696
Building permits, 2015	226	0	2	0	1	4826

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

Source: QuickFacts data are derived from: Population Estimates, American Community Survey, Census of Population and Housing, Current Population Survey, Small Area Health Insurance Estimates, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, State and County Housing Unit Estimates, County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, Economic Census, Survey of Business Owners, Building Permits.

DRAFT

- Proximity to a larger community diminishes support for local small businesses.
- Absentee landowners that do not support redevelopment efforts or allow blight to occur.
- Lack of partnerships and cooperation among governments and entities, reducing the effectiveness of all.
- Poverty, homelessness, hunger, drug addiction and crime are also issues.

Opportunities

- Opportunity to increase the collaboration among government entities, organizations and communities in the region.
- Access to additional adult education.
- Utilize additional planning for economic development.
- Enhancing high speed internet.
- Attracting or developing a value-added agricultural manufacturing facility.
- Recruiting and retaining “high quality” workers.
- Expand upon existing infrastructure.
- Protect and expand existing economic base. (Including military, agriculture and existing industrial clusters).
- Enhancing and preserving culture diversity in the region (Native American, Hutterites).

Threats

- Lack of younger people moving into the region.
- Inadequate social amenities.
- A lack of skilled workforce threatens growth and development of individual companies.
- An inability of local entities to work collaboratively to solve issues.
- The lack of financial resources; heavy reliance on federal funding for achieving many goals.
- Access to capital for agriculture, value-added agriculture, and new businesses.
- Negative attitudes towards growth by local leaders.
- Access to rail an issue for some.

Appendix O: County Profiles

The counties in the region are quite diverse and so we have included a profile here to give more detailed information about each.

The “word clouds” prior to the summary of each community represent the importance of the concepts to the local residents based on how frequently they were mentioned during the discussion. The word clouds were created using the Wordle online application.

area are strong economic assets. The county has ample open space and available water which is a unique strength they can use for further development.

Weaknesses

One of the greatest weaknesses identified by attendees of the input session is that the workforce is not growing as fast as the demand for workers is growing and the technical skills of the workforce could be improved. Related to the availability of workforce is the need for additional workforce housing priced in the range of \$175,000-\$200,000. Wages are low compared to the national average and addiction and mental health are negatively impacting availability of workforce.

People in Great Falls expressed desire for economic diversification which would become a common theme throughout all parts of the region. Leaders here felt like the economy was over reliant on a couple of industry sectors. Similar to other communities in the region, the demand for additional value-added agriculture was described as a significant opportunity.

Infrastructure was described as lacking in the area, including roads, water systems, sewer and deferred maintenance in public buildings. Great Falls downtown was perceived as less vibrant than other downtown areas in Montana, which is a weakness for the region. A number of key properties are going undeveloped due to absentee landowners.

Opportunities

Leaders in Great Falls were very optimistic about the future. They see many opportunities and a willingness among leaders and the community to work together to take Great Falls to the next level. In particular, the opportunity to create a community-wide working group to create an overall strategy to address talent retention and attraction was noted and some were looking at models from other communities that Great Falls might follow. Continuing to support the very active downtown partnership would be helpful in further revitalizing the downtown area. Protecting and expanding the military presence and the other existing industrial clusters was identified as an opportunity for the community.

Other opportunities identified were to take care of infrastructure issues to make the community look and function well. Enhancing broadband internet access to the region would be helpful to area employers in securing additional workforce working remotely from the surrounding area to Great Falls. Of particular interest were improving the roads into Great Falls, upgrading the power plants, enhancing residential access to businesses, trails, sidewalks and wayfinding. Passing the school bond would go a long way to addressing deferred maintenance in the schools to make their appearance as strong as their performance.

Some of the threats to success included a general attitude of local leaders that is not growth or risk oriented. Achieving some of the goals identified may be challenging without taking some risk and being supportive of growth. Leaders need to be able to work together to address challenging issues such as workforce and infrastructure. Without collaboration, achieving these goals will be difficult.

Having enough tax base is also a challenge in achieving some of the infrastructure improvements that were identified as a need. Access to private capital is an ongoing challenge that could reduce the

opportunities for success. Losing the military is a risk that is outside of the control of local leaders, but could happen.

Geography

The County is approximately 2,698 square miles and in 2015, there were 30.1 persons per square mile. The County is bordered on the west by the Rocky Mountains, to the southeast by the Little Belt and Highwood Mountains, and by the Hi-line area to the North.

Great Falls is an economic center for the region, drawing people from the surrounding smaller rural communities for shopping, medical care and other services. Great Falls has over ten museums and interpretive centers, a symphony, outdoor recreation, rodeos, concerts, two breweries and many great restaurants. Great Falls is home to Malmstrom Air Force Base which is known to be a huge economic driver in the area with over 2,700 employees. Great Falls has an international airport and is served by Interstate 15 and key state highways giving it good transportation access.

Population

The median age in Cascade County was just slightly higher than the nation at 38.1 years compared to 37.4. The median per capita income in 2014 was \$25,216. Poverty levels for individuals in Cascade County was 14.4 percent and 10.7 percent for families compared to 15.6 percent for individuals and 11.5 percent for families in the U.S.

Cascade County had a relatively low level of diversity with 89.3 percent of the population identifying as white alone. The next highest percentage identified as American Indian alone at 4.5 percent, then 3.5 percent identifying as two or more races, 1.3 percent identifying as Black or African American alone.

Participants of the input session in Great Falls identified available workforce as a significant constraint to economic development. Cascade County has the second highest rate of high school graduates in the region at 91.2 percent behind Teton County. Cascade has the highest rate of Bachelor's degree or higher in the region, which makes sense given the presence of large corporate employers in Great Falls.

Industry and Economy

Great Falls is a retail and service center for the region and serves as a hub for many other communities and small towns in the surrounding area. Cascade County and the city of Great Falls is home to many large employers including Benefis Health Systems, Walmart and Great Falls Clinic. Great Falls Development Authority is the local development organization, servicing the local area with technical assistance and the ability to provide financial assistance to the region. In total, there were 2,420 employer establishments in 2014 with a total employment of 29,990 which is an increase of 3.5 percent

over 2013. There were 15.6 percent of the population without health insurance under the age of 65 in 2014.

Malmstrom Air Force Base is a driving force in the regional economy, employing over 2,700 individuals. Malmstrom has been part of the Great Falls community since 1939. (Montana Department of Labor and Industry, 2012)

Great Falls Development Authority is the local development organization, providing services to the local area with technical assistance and the ability to provide financial assistance to the region.

Housing

In 2015, there were 37,932 housing units in the County which was an increase of 656 units or 1.76 percent increase from 2010. The homeownership rate was at 64.3 percent with the median value of owner-occupied housing at \$159,900. There were 2.36 persons per household.

Planning documents

Cascade County's growth policy can be found here: <http://www.greatfallsmt.net/planning/growth-policy-2013>

Great Falls Development Authority Forward Great Falls Strategic Plan can be found here: <http://files.constantcontact.com/3e765937001/bdc1125a-6d85-4910-901e-5bde61bbfd1d.pdf?ver=1462188856000> .

area is a strength on which to build. The quality education system was mentioned at the Blackfeet Community College and the other schools in the area. The local people have a passion for the place and are oriented toward service to the people. The agricultural base was identified as a strong asset for the region as was the health care systems.

At the input session in Cut Bank, participants identified the agricultural base of the area as the primary strength for the area. Citizens also counted their location near Glacier National Park, the Blackfeet Community College, strong public schools and healthcare as strengths for the area. Cut Bank participants described the workforce as a strength and public facilities including the library, the rec center, the pool, the museum and the anticipated upgrades to the local infrastructure. Access to highway 2, the airport and Amtrak as well as the Northern Transit Interlocal were strengths of the region.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses that might make it challenging for Glacier County to achieve its goals centered on leadership, collaboration and the built environment. At the meeting at the College, the lack of cohesiveness among the organizations in the community was a significant challenge for the area. People described a lack of partnerships among existing organizations and a tendency to work in “silos.” Attendees described a low level of understanding among the people in the area regarding what it takes to start and run a business.

Adequate housing was a weakness identified in the Browning session as was the prevalence of drugs, homelessness, poverty and high unemployment rates. Federal, fee and trust land are common in the area and can be a barrier for people to buy homes and finance businesses. The physical isolation and the weather was considered a challenge in Browning.

The weaknesses identified during the Cut Bank session were fairly different than the Browning session. Cut Bank participants thought the lack of lodging, lack of senior housing, lack of retail shopping and their grocery store were weaknesses for the area. They thought the workforce needed more daycare options, additional housing and quality afterschool care. Some of the buildings in town were described as underutilized due to absentee owners.

Opportunities

With significant effort Glacier County, Cut Bank and the Blackfeet Nation could align its resources to take advantage of the potential that exists due to the county’s location next to Glacier National Park as well as the current interest in cultural and heritage tourism. Significant planning, collaboration and education among federal, state, County, City, college and other entities would be required, but could help the region become a destination for tourism. Cut Bank community members saw inviting former residents that have gone on to become successful in other areas to come back and speak about their success as an opportunity. Those people may see potential in Cut Bank and invest or help get some business opportunities going.

Threats

Reliance on federal funding and the challenging federal laws that complicate land ownership threaten achieving the desired future. The need for buy-in and support from the Tribal Council is a further threat.

Population

Glacier County is home to the Blackfeet Nation where 65.6 percent of the population identify as American Indian and Alaska Native, 33.4 percent identify as White alone.

The median age in Glacier County was the youngest in the region at 31 years in 2014 which was up 1.3 percent from the median age of 30.6 in 2000.

High school graduates make up 84.3 percent of the population of Glacier County and 18.3 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. Median household income was \$33,493 in 2014 when individual income was \$16,710. The percentage of people living in poverty is the highest in the region at 31.8 percent.

Geography

The County is approximately 2,995 square miles with 4.5 people per square mile. It is on the western edge of the Sweetgrass Region and is made up of rolling hills and mountains including the eastern part of Glacier National Park.

Industry and Economy

There were 1,162 firms in Glacier County in 2014 with a total employment of 2,451. Just under half of all firms were minority owned at 460. Approximately 27.3 percent of the population did not have health insurance.

Housing

In 2015, there were 5,314 housing units in the County which was a decrease of 34 units or -0.64 percent from 2010. The homeownership rate was 58.6 percent with a median value of owner-occupied housing of \$85,800. There were 3.16 persons per household.

Planning documents

Glacier County's growth policy can be found by calling the Commissioner's office at (406) 873-3600.

Weaknesses

Conrad, in particular, has had difficulty recruiting and retaining skilled workers. Despite the progressive leadership, there are still some in the community who resist change. The population in the county is older compared to the surrounding communities and some of the communities in the county are particularly isolated.

Opportunities

Participants in the Conrad input session strongly desire to increase value-added agriculture in the area. They thought that completing a feasibility study and securing funding would make this opportunity a possibility for the county. Increased educational opportunities for local farmers regarding other crops or methods that might extend the season or bring higher margins is another opportunity that could be explored.

Threats

Threats to the community are a lack of financing for value added agricultural enterprises, changes to the agricultural markets that favor new crops and transportation externalities.

Population

The median age in Pondera County was 42.2 in 2014 which was up 9.3 percent from the median age of 38.6 years of age in 2000.

Diversity in Pondera County was relatively high for the region, likely due to the fact that it is home to the eastern portion of the Blackfeet Reservation and the community of Heart Butte. In 2015, 82.6 percent of the population identified as white alone and 14.2 percent identified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone in 2015.

Over 88 percent of the population in Pondera County had at least a high school diploma. Twenty-two percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. People living below the poverty line included 20.3 percent of the population. Median household income in 2014 was \$40,969 and per capital income was \$22,868.

Housing

In 2015, there were 2,634 housing units in the County which was a decrease of -0.94 percent from the number of housing units in 2010 which was 2,659. The homeownership rate was at 68.7 percent with the median value of owner-occupied housing at \$105,800. There were 2.52 persons per household.

Geography

The County is approximately 1,622 square miles and in 2010, there were 3.8 people per square mile. The land includes vast expanses of farmland and prairies.

Industry and Economy

In total, there were 680 firms in the County with total employment in 2014 of 1,352 which is a decrease of -3.2 percent from 2013. Conrad is a relatively full service community with car dealerships, a robust main street and numerous restaurants.

Planning documents

Growth policies for Pondera County, Conrad and Valier can be found at the Pondera Regional Port Authority's website: <http://ponderaportauthority.com/growth.htm>.

and other necessities rather than spending money in Teton County. The population of working aged adults was described by participants as growing smaller.

Opportunities

If the price of oil changes, participants believe that a company with welding and electrical jobs will be started. Participants believed the community of Choteau and Teton County to be well suited to telecommuters because of the affordable housing, good school system and high quality of life. Whether or not this group of workers discovers the community and actually finds it appealing is outside of the control of the local community. A strong marketing campaign may be helpful in helping spread the word about the opportunity.

Threats

A threat to the community is the changing nature of agriculture which requires fewer employees to run a successful operation compared to years ago when it was quite labor intensive. With fewer required workers, there are fewer jobs in the community, fewer families and fewer kids in the school.

Population

The median age in Teton County was 44.9 in 2014 which was up 12.3 percent from the median age of 40 in 2000.

The county is quite homogenous with over 95 percent of the population identifying as white alone and only 1.7 percent identified as American Indian and Alaska Native alone in 2015, the lowest percentage in the region.

Over 91 percent of the population in Teton County had at least a high school diploma. Twenty-two percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. People living below the poverty line included 13.9 percent of the population.

Median household income in 2014 was \$45,572 and per capital income was \$23,871.

Housing

In 2015, there were 2,876 housing units in the County which was a decrease of 16 units or -0.55 percent. The homeownership rate was at 76.1 percent with the median value of owner-occupied housing at \$135,600. There were 2.48 persons per household.

Geography

The County is approximately 2,272 square miles and in 2010, there were 2.7 people per square mile. Teton County is made up of rolling hills, some fields of grain and Rocky Mountains to the west.

Industry and Economy

In total, there were 734 firms in the County with total employment in 2014 of 1163 which is a decrease of -4.1 percent from 2013.

Planning Documents

Teton County's growth policy can be found at the county website:

<http://tetoncomt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Teton-County-Growth-Policy-June-2016-compressed.pdf>

Choteau's growth policy can be found at the town's website:

<http://choteaumt.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/City-of-Choteau-Growth-Policy-2016-with-maps.pdf>

The up to date public infrastructure in and around Shelby was also listed as a strength of the area. Other strengths centered on the built environment include the hospital, the school system, senior housing, head start, the preschool, assisted living, the prison, wind farms and walking trails. Toole County has many strengths on which to build and is well versed in talking about them.

Weaknesses

The list of weaknesses was shorter for Toole County and Shelby, but significant nonetheless. Available moderately priced housing suitable for workforce was the primary weakness identified by the group. The number of workers available is not enough to meet the needs of local employers. In addition, the workforce is older than average and participants said that not enough younger workers are coming in to replace the older workforce. Additional improvements to the infrastructure are needed. Adding some distance education opportunities for adults would help as would some support for main street retail businesses.

Opportunities

Attracting a developer to build additional housing for workforce would be a huge opportunity that would help attract and retain younger workers. Awards of grant funds would help secure the infrastructure needs identified. A new microbrewery in Shelby's main street district would help anchor and stabilize the downtown business district.

Threats

The aging workforce is an external threat to the community that could make operating businesses challenging if not impossible. This threat could be mitigated by creating quality of life amenities that are particularly attractive to younger workers with young families such as affordable, healthy food and activities. Some of the attendees noted that some young families have moved back to Shelby, but found the lack of healthy food and activities to be significant enough for them to move or consider moving away.

Population

Toole County's population is decreasing and getting older, just as the attendees at the input session suggested. The county had 5,087 people in 2015 which was a decrease of -4.5 percent from the 2010 population of 5,324. The median age in Toole County was 41.5 in 2014 which was up by 12.3 percent from the median age of 39.1 in 2000 which was the largest age increase in the region.

Ninety percent of Toole County residents identified as white alone; only 5.5 percent identified as American Indian.

Over 87 percent of the population in Toole County had at least a high school diploma. Only 14.4 percent had a bachelor's degree or higher. People living below the poverty line included 17.2 percent of the population.

Median household income in 2014 was \$46,917 and per capital income was \$22,837.

Housing

In 2015, there were 2,341 housing units in the County which was an increase of only five units or 0.21 percent from 2010. The homeownership rate was at 60.6 percent with the median value of owner-occupied housing at \$107,400. There were 2.22 persons per household.

Geography

The County is approximately 1,915 square miles and in 2010, there were 2.8 people per square mile. The county includes rolling hills, small grain farms and prairie.

Industry and Economy

In total, there were 574 firms in the County with total employment in 2014 of 1,649 which is an increase of 1.9 percent from 2013.

Planning Documents

Toole County's growth policy can be found at their website:

http://www.toolecountymt.gov/pdf/2016_Toole_County_Growth_Policy/1_Toole_County_Growth_Policy_Complete.pdf

The City of Shelby's growth policy can be found at their website:

<http://www.shelbymt.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/1-Growth-Policy-2012.pdf>

Appendix P: Disaster and Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a disaster, Sweetgrass Development Corporation, in conjunction with its regional partners, is prepared to facilitate planning and recovery efforts as outlined in the following strategy document. However, this brief strategy is in no way intended to undermine or replace existing federal, state, or local disaster plans. This document simply establishes Sweetgrass Development Corporation's role in both pre- and post-disaster planning and recovery.

Sweetgrass Region is covered by The Montana Disaster and Emergency Service District Section 2. Each of the counties in the region has a disaster and emergency preparedness plan in place which covers natural disasters to terrorism, violence and natural disasters.

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters can be a large financial burden on individuals and communities. This region faces potential landslide, wind, hail, tornado, winter storms, flood and wildfire threat. State and national agencies, FEMA, and the SBA are some sources of funds to assist with natural disaster cleanup and assistance.

Winter weather can be severe and can lead to power outages, avalanches, frozen pipes and ice jams. Montana snow is generally dry and snow loads do not threaten roof collapse with the exception of the northwestern portion of the region.

The western part of the region faces higher threats of landslides and forest fires due to the mountain range and forests that border it.

Wind, hail and tornado damage occurs mostly in the summer months. In Montana, most of the tornadoes occur in June and July. Electric utilities in Montana are usually the first entities to experience loss from severe summer weather events. Losses to local electric utilities can be expensive to replace and put a major burden on other emergency services.

Flooding, ice jams and dam failure have caused great damage in this region. Damages resulting from ice jams can affect roads, bridges, buildings and homes and can cost the affected community thousands to millions of dollars. In most instances, ice jams result in highly localized, yet serious damage, which makes it difficult to obtain typical disaster assistance available to large-scale flooding events. Flash flooding is also common along drainages during summer storms.

Vulnerability to dam failure is compounded by differences in the dam inundation areas versus the 100-year floodplain. Floodplain development, in most cases, is regulated, whereas dam inundation areas are not. Extreme rain and snow melt events can exceed the flood storage capacity of even large reservoirs. At such times, the excess water that passes over the spillway can cause damages downstream that approach those damages that would have occurred had the flood control dam not been built.

Terrorism and Violence

According to the 2007 updated State of Montana Multi Hazard Mitigation Plan (Montana Department of Military Affairs), the greatest risk of violence or terrorism in this region would be considered hate

groups in Montana, still active in 2005. Montana also has a long international border with Canada which presents unique challenges and vulnerabilities.

Toxic Release Inventory for Montana

The only two toxic release facilities in this region are the US Air Force Malmstrom Air Force Base and the Montana Refining Company in Great Falls. Malmstrom has disposed lead compounds. Montana Refining Company, has disposed of a range of toxic compounds.

Toxic Spills

There is a threat for toxic spills and chemical-related disasters. Cascade County was noted to have had six transportation-based hazardous spills and 17 fixed facility-based spills (as noted in the 2007 State of Montana Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan).

There are approximately 61 miles of interstate, 118 miles of pipeline and 196 miles of rail in Cascade County alone, which marks it as the second highest composite risk index in the state, following Yellowstone County. This, as well as the location of an oil refinery in Great Falls, enhances the need to take these things into consideration for mitigation of future spills, and also for more pro-active planning.

Definitions

Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 10-3-103 defines the following:

(3) "Disaster" means the occurrence or imminent threat of widespread or severe damage, injury, or loss of life or property resulting from any natural or artificial cause, including tornadoes, windstorms, snowstorms, wind-driven water, high water, floods, wave action, earthquakes, landslides, mudslides, volcanic action, fires, explosions, air or water contamination requiring emergency action to avert danger or damage, blight, droughts, infestations, riots, sabotage, hostile military or paramilitary action, disruption of state services, accidents involving radiation byproducts or other hazardous materials, outbreak of disease, bioterrorism, or incidents involving weapons of mass destruction.

(7) "Emergency" means the imminent threat of a disaster causing immediate peril to life or property that timely action can avert or minimize.

Phase I: Pre-disaster Preparedness

Sweetgrass Development supports and encourages its communities to:

- Engage in pre-disaster recovery and mitigation planning
- Regularly assess the community's risks and vulnerabilities
- Inventory and organize the community's recovery resources
- Engage in business continuity planning
- Ensure resources are available for the elderly and those with special needs
- Identify shelters
- Identify recovery partners, as well as the type of assistance and resources they can provide
- Establish a timeline for recovery activities (immediate, short-term, intermediate, and long-term)

- Develop and disseminate a community evacuation plan
- Establish a communication chain
- Engage the community's residents in the planning and recovery process

Regional Risks and Vulnerabilities

The region is vulnerable to a wide variety of disasters including, but not limited to, fires, flooding, chemical/biological warfare, dam failure, drought and extreme heat, freeze events and extreme cold, earthquakes, hazardous materials, nuclear attack, tornadoes, vector-borne diseases, volcanic fallout, violence, and terrorism.

Recovery and Mitigation: Sweetgrass Development Regional Challenges

Population is dispersed over a large area with both rural and urban environments

Lack of comprehensive services

Isolation/lack of access outside of cities

Limited options for transmitting information outside of cities

Possibility for widespread interruption of services

High percentage of stationary, at-risk population (elderly)

Limited transit options in both urban and rural area

Limited incomes

Few liquid assets, significant amount of money tied up in land and equipment

Vulnerable infrastructure, including historic sites and structures

Heavy reliance on imported materials and food

Recovery and Mitigation Planning

Without being prepared for the complexity of redevelopment in a compressed timeframe following a major disaster, local officials may struggle with recovery decisions and miss opportunities for public participation in reshaping the community's future. To become more disaster-resilient, local governments should plan for what must happen after rescue and recovery operations are completed in order to return the community to normal or perhaps rebuild an even better community. Through a Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan (PDRP or Plan), local governments can collaboratively create a long-term recovery and redevelopment strategy in pursuit of a sustainable community.

Plans identify policies, operational strategies, as well as roles and responsibilities for implementation that will guide decisions affecting long-term recovery and redevelopment of the community after a disaster. They emphasize seizing opportunities for hazard mitigation and community improvement consistent with the goals of local and regional comprehensive plans, with full participation from the area's citizens.

There are three principal benefits to having a well-developed Plan:

1) Faster and More Efficient Recovery

Without a comprehensive, long-term recovery plan, ad hoc efforts in the aftermath of a significant disaster will delay the return of community stability. Creating a process to make smart post-disaster decisions and prepare for long-term recovery requirements enables a community to do more than react, prompting post-disaster action rather than time-consuming debate. By identifying appropriate planning mechanisms, financial assistance, and agency roles and responsibilities beforehand, a community begins the road to recovery more quickly. Being able to show efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars after a disaster is incredibly important for the public's perception of the recovery.

2) Opportunity to Build Back Better

A disaster, while tragic, can also create opportunities to fix past mistakes or leap forward with plans for community improvements. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, local officials are under significant pressure to restore the community to its pre-disaster condition. Without a guiding vision, short-term decisions may inadvertently restrict long-term, sustainable redevelopment and overlook opportunities to surpass the status quo. A Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan strengthens the recovery process, and communities benefit from assessing their risk levels and crafting a long-term redevelopment plan under "blue skies." Local officials and the public can thoughtfully analyze and debate issues, linking redevelopment goals with other important community plans. Careful thought and planning achieves a more sustainable and resilient outcome than decisions made under emergency circumstances, compromised budgets, and political pressures.

3) Local Control Over Recovery

Developing a PDRP provides local government officials, residents, and businesses the opportunity to determine long-term redevelopment goals and develop policies and procedures that will guide redevelopment before well-intended outside agencies and non-government organizations rush to aid the community. While outside resources are needed and welcomed in a major or catastrophic disaster, a locally developed Plan will best channel those resources to effectively meet the community's specific needs and goals. A Post-Disaster Redevelopment Plan will show outside agencies and donors that the community is prepared to play an active role in the recovery process and promote its capabilities to wisely use donated and loaned resources. There will always be rules and, occasionally, strings attached to external sources of funding, but a community that has researched the allowable uses of federal and state assistance can better work within their boundaries in an effort to fund projects that further local and regional redevelopment goals.

Can A Disaster Provide Opportunity To Advance Your Community's Vision?

Sweetgrass Development's communities participated in the region's comprehensive planning process. A PDRP can identify disaster scenarios in which opportunities may be present to advance already-stated visions for these communities in a compressed timeframe.

Opportunities to Consider During Post-Disaster Redevelopment

- Disaster-resilient land use patterns
- Hazard mitigation construction techniques
- Energy-efficient buildings
- Healthy community design
- Affordable or workforce housing
- Alternative transportation networks
- Environmental preservation and habitat restoration
- Sustainable industry recruitment

Tornadoes, wildfires, floods, and other disasters do not confine themselves to jurisdictional boundaries. Displaced residents, compromised infrastructure, changes in economic conditions, hazardous materials contamination, and degradation of sensitive environments are some of the impacts that can affect an entire region after a major disaster. When recovery is slow, neighboring communities also experience these impacts for an extended period of time.

A PDRP is designed to be used in any disaster, regardless of type, as long as the damage will require long-term redevelopment efforts. It is an all-hazards plan addressing disasters identified in each county's Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) and each community's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP). As an economic development organization serving Cascade, Glacier, Pondera, Teton and Toole Counties, Sweetgrass Development will respond accordingly, utilizing the resources and information outlined in the region's CEDS document. Therefore, counties are encouraged to incorporate PDRP strategies into their disaster planning documents.

Disaster Phases and Redevelopment

Disaster management is typically viewed as a cycle with overlapping phases: 1) pre-disaster mitigation and emergency management preparedness; 2) emergency response; 3) short-term recovery; and 4) long-term recovery and redevelopment.

Pre-Disaster Phase – Mitigation and recovery planning occurs during the pre-disaster phase (unless a community is struck by a disaster before planning is complete). Once a mitigation and recovery plan is adopted, preparatory activities should be implemented on an on-going basis during normal operations, which are sometimes referred to as "blue skies." Plans should be tested prior to a disaster event, so that all stakeholders with a post-disaster implementation role are familiar with their responsibilities.

Emergency Response Phase –Emergency response activities are specifically addressed in a municipality's EOP and include immediate actions to save lives, protect property, and meet basic

human needs. This is the shortest phase of the cycle, lasting only a few days in minor disaster conditions.

Short-Term Recovery Phase – The role of any plan during the short-term recovery phase is to begin organizing for long-term redevelopment activities and guiding short-term recovery decisions that may have long-term implications (e.g., placement of temporary housing or debris sites). Short-term recovery operations are addressed in EOPs, but a recovery plan can provide direction for transitioning to long-term redevelopment during this phase. The short-term recovery phase begins as the emergency response phase is winding down and will continue until critical services are restored. The duration of the short-term recovery phase depends on the severity of the disaster and the level of community preparedness.

Long-Term Recovery and Redevelopment Phase – A recovery plan is used most during this phase. Long-term recovery and redevelopment includes efforts to reconstruct and enhance the built environment, as well as recover the economy, environment, and social systems. This phase begins as short-term recovery activities are accomplished and can last from a couple years for a minor disaster to five or more years for a major or catastrophic disaster.

Interaction with Other Plans

The objective of this “Disaster and Economic Recovery and Resiliency Strategy” is to guide the redevelopment decision-making process following a disaster in a manner consistent with local comprehensive plans (especially Future Land Use maps, where applicable), Local Mitigation Strategies, Emergency Operation Plans, and other relevant plans or codes such as land development regulations. Each of these plans, and potentially others, has pre-existing policies or procedures that affect post-disaster redevelopment. For instance, local comprehensive plans include many policies that determine where and to what extent redevelopment can occur. Ultimately, Sweetgrass Development will help its counties and communities access the information and resources necessary for making post-disaster redevelopment decisions.

Sweetgrass Development Region: Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) Contact Information

Vince Kolar, Cascade County
521 1st Avenue NW
Great Falls, MT 59401
406-454-6900

Charles Farmer- Glacier County
512 East Main Street
Cut Bank, MT 59427
406-873-3647

LeAnn Hermance– Pondera County
20 4th Ave. SW
Conrad, MT 59425

406-271-4040

Debra Coverdell- Teton County
P.O. Box 610
Choteau, Montana 59422
406-466-5552

Darrell Stafford- Toole County
360 East Marias Road
Cut Bank, MT 59427
406-450-8972

Phase II: Post-disaster Planning and Implementation

Disaster Assessment

In the days and weeks following a disaster, Sweetgrass Development will be available to assist counties and communities:

- Assess the nature and magnitude of the disaster
- Assess the impact on both local and regional economies (business, industry sectors, labor market, etc.)
- Assess the impact on transportation and public infrastructure
- Assess the impact on housing, schools, and health care facilities

Develop and/or Implement Recovery Timeline

Based on the results of the disaster assessment, Sweetgrass Development will help regional partners and community leaders move forward with:

- Listing and prioritizing recovery activities to be performed
- Identifying resources (federal, state, local, and private sector) needed for each activity
- Determining the level and type of assistance needed
- Identifying roles and responsibilities
- Determining the timeframe for each recovery activity (immediate, short-term, intermediate, or long-term)
- Establishing recovery benchmarks

Implementing the Recovery Plan (long-term recovery)

In order to accomplish recovery activities quantified as part of long-term recovery, Sweetgrass Development is capable of:

- Identifying business, economic, and entrepreneurial rebuild initiatives
- Identifying and utilizing workforce initiatives to employ workers and rebuild the local economy
- Applying for funds from federal, state, and local programs

- Developing management plans to ensure the most effective use of funds

Prioritizing Areas to Focus Redevelopment

Limited time, funds, and materials are going to make simultaneous redevelopment of all damaged areas difficult. Communities may want to encourage redevelopment in areas that correspond to their vision for the future and those less vulnerable to disasters by prioritizing and incentivizing development in these areas. The best way to build resiliency to disasters is to direct future development to safe locations, while minimizing or mitigating highly vulnerable types of development in hazardous areas. After a disaster, targeted sustainable redevelopment areas can provide immediate opportunities for redevelopment since they will have sustained less damage and can be prioritized for infrastructure restoration and expedited permitting. Allowing for rapid redevelopment in safe areas intended for increased future development will minimize vulnerable redevelopment and/or allow time to plan the sustainable reconstruction of areas severely impacted by the disaster. Designated priority recovery and redevelopment areas can also be used to locate temporary post-disaster facilities more efficiently that are consistent with future land uses.

Historic Preservation and Restoration

The loss of historic resources due to a disaster can have a major impact on the community. Some losses may be unavoidable, but others could occur accidentally during recovery operations if procedures are not in place to watch for these concerns. Historic structures are particularly vulnerable to damage due to their age, and repair of these structures must meet certain requirements to maintain their character and historic designation. There may also be funding opportunities before or after a disaster for implementing mitigation measures to prevent further damage to historic resources. Engaging state and local historic preservation organizations in the planning and implementation process can ensure that the unique considerations involved with preserving and restoring historic structures and archeological sites are included in a community's recovery plan.

Reducing Disaster Vulnerability through Land Use and Development Regulations

The best practice for post-disaster redevelopment is to restrict rebuilding in hazardous locations and require mitigation where vulnerable redevelopment cannot be precluded. While this plan of action would ensure optimal community resiliency to disasters, it may be very difficult to achieve and may not be a good choice for the first action to be tackled when implementing any recovery plan. However, with careful consideration of the legal implications concerning property rights and extensive public outreach, there are many regulatory tools for increasing disaster resiliency that may be a possibility for the region, especially if pursued during the post-disaster "window of opportunity" for future reductions in disaster vulnerability. Potential regulatory methods could include reduced intensity or density of use, special permit requirements, increased setbacks from hazard sources (e.g., a waterway or building, etc.), hazard-specific site design requirements, and/or increased structural mitigation requirements. These methods could be implemented through policies instituting lower damage thresholds requiring nonconforming uses/structures to meet current standards (in certain zones or throughout the jurisdiction), zoning overlay districts, post-disaster specific land development codes, and/or special assessment districts to fund mitigation projects that benefit more than one property.

ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT

The ability of a local economy to rebound after a disaster dictates the success of the community's long-term recovery. The return of jobs, tourism, capital investments, and other indicators of economic health are dependent upon housing recovery, infrastructure restoration, environmental restoration, and social service provision. The involvement of the private sector in the post-disaster planning process is imperative for determining the priorities and actions that will be beneficial to restoring the local economy. Consideration must be given to the different obstacles that could potentially hinder economic recovery, such as those that small businesses will face, decisions large employers will have to make about whether to relocate, opportunities for sustainable diversification of the economic base, and job training and workforce recruitment needed to meet altered market conditions after a major disaster.

Resumption and Retention of Major Employers

Rapid resumption of existing major employers is key to a community's economic recovery after a disaster, especially as employment provides a reason for most residents to return and rebuild quickly. Typically, the major employers in the region are already going to have business continuity plans and will not need the basic disaster preparedness education necessary for smaller businesses. These companies are often able to work with local governments as partners in planning for post-disaster redevelopment and provide insight as to what government assistance they will need to ensure rapid resumption. Major employers may also have the means to assist in actions to support workforce retention if included in the planning process. While large company recovery assistance will vary, typically businesses located in hazardous areas or older structures may need assistance to reopen or relocate, temporarily or permanently, within the area.

If businesses do not feel a sense of connection to the community or fear that recovery will not be successful, there is a chance that they will relocate their company elsewhere after a disaster. This is especially the case for corporate headquarters and industries that are not location-dependent or whose location choice is tied to quality of life factors. Mitigation and recovery plans provide the private sector with confidence in the community's ability to continue providing the market environment necessary for conducting business. Some factors that may aid the retention of major employers include a high level of communication before and after a disaster about post-disaster redevelopment goals and expectations and/or incentives to ensure retention, if necessary.

Small Business Assistance

A "small business" is often perceived as a family-owned business that provides services solely to the local community. Small businesses comprise much of the businesses in Sweetgrass Development region outside of Great Falls. Small businesses are more likely than large businesses to either never reopen after a major disaster or fail shortly after reopening. Several factors may be involved in these failures, including the extent of damage to a community, timing of reopening, and lack of financial reserves.

Short periods without cash flow can be damaging, and small businesses often find restrictions and loan arrangements overwhelming. The region's SBDC Director will be on-hand to help guide businesses through the redevelopment process. Sweetgrass Development also has access to certain RLF funds that may be available to businesses during post-disaster redevelopment. *A complete list of economic development partners and resources can be found on page 11 of the CEDS document.* Loans are typically based on the pre-event business and tax returns of the firm and require extensive

collateralization. Post-disaster market changes, however, may mean the company isn't able to do as well as it did pre-disaster, and the loan, even at below-market interest rates, sometimes becomes a burden to the long-term survivability of the business.

Workforce Retention

While trying to retain existing businesses, efforts must also address retaining the workforce that supports those businesses. Actions such as ensuring that schools reopen and childcare is available, allowing temporary on-site housing for employees, and communication of a community's post-disaster plan can assist in getting employees back to jobs as soon as the businesses have reopened.

After a disaster, the market for certain businesses may decrease or be eliminated due to financial troubles or customer demand changes. However, other industries may provide employment opportunities, such as the construction industry, which will boom temporarily due to rebuilding needs. Workforce training programs are important to provide residents with appropriate skill sets to fill newly available positions due to recovery efforts and to adjust workforce skills to other industries that may take a more permanent hold in the community due to post-disaster business recruitment efforts. Providing locals with first preference for temporary recovery work is important for keeping workers from moving out of the area.

Physical Economic Redevelopment Projects

In some circumstances, opportunities may arise after a disaster to move forward with planned physical economic development projects or to create new projects that take advantage of post-disaster funding, available land, or public will. Economic development projects that are disaster-resilient and fill a need in the community after a disaster should be a priority for post-disaster funding. In addition, the community can prioritize projects that incorporate energy efficiency and other "green" building design considerations. Business districts can be prime locations to focus post-disaster redevelopment projects since these districts offer financial tools or incentives, such as tax increment financing, reductions on impact fees, and state tax incentives. Economic leaders can also consider ways to expand these business districts and leverage funding that would be available through disaster programs from several federal agencies, including the Community Development Block Grant program and Economic Development Administration disaster assistance program.

Opportunities to Sustainably Restore Economic Vitality

Retaining existing businesses is the first priority after a disaster; however, post-disaster redevelopment may also present an opportunity for businesses to assess their long-term applicability in the local market and take advantage of any changes in demographics or business incentives that may occur due to disaster impacts and an influx in outside funding to the area. For instance, a business that was already struggling before the disaster may need to rethink its business plan and use the disaster as an entrepreneurial impetus unless it happens to be engaged in one of the few economic activities that benefit from a disaster, such as the development industry.

Inevitably, some large and small businesses that bear the brunt of significant damage or indirect losses are going to fail or choose to relocate after a major disaster. This can affect the unemployment rate of the county if new businesses do not replace those that relocate. Outside of the city of Great Falls, the

Sweetgrass Development region struggles with a lack of economic diversity, which means that in the event of a disaster the loss of one business could mean the loss off all the local benefits provided by that employer/industry. Efforts to diversify the local economy with industries that are less vulnerable to disasters should be integrated into ongoing economic development activities. Industries targeted for attraction and incentive programs after a disaster should be those that will provide a more disaster-resilient and sustainable economy for the community and are appropriate for the post-disaster circumstances.

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INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC FACILITIES

Restoration of infrastructure and critical public facilities after a disaster is a prerequisite for recovery – one that is addressed in local government and private utility and infrastructure companies’ emergency response and short- term recovery plans. There are long-term redevelopment considerations for infrastructure restoration, however, that must be weighed in conjunction with land use, environment, housing, and economic redevelopment issues.

Taking advantage of opportunities to upgrade, mitigate, or even relocate infrastructure or public facilities after a disaster is critical. Advanced planning allows a community to make deliberate decisions about redevelopment that it may otherwise have had less opportunity to do during the post-disaster rush to rebuild. Decisions about infrastructure reconstruction will influence private redevelopment decisions, and using disaster repairs as an opportunity to include hazard mitigation allows a local government to lead by example.

There are many agencies, jurisdictions, and stakeholders involved in providing infrastructure, public facilities, and utility services. Before and after a disaster, these private and public entities need to establish communication and coordination procedures to ensure that long-term recovery and redevelopment occurs in an efficient and organized manner. Each agency or company should have its own recovery plan; however, if any opportunities for directing redevelopment are to be pursued then coordination and communication are critical.

Types of Infrastructure and Public Facilities to Address in Post-disaster Redevelopment Planning

A community’s infrastructure is made up of a number of different systems and structures, each of which should be considered carefully:

- *Transportation systems* – The repair of roads, bridges, railroads, airports, and public transit is essential to establishing normal operations within a community. The repair of these and other types of infrastructure is often necessary for other redevelopment efforts to take place. Post-disaster redevelopment can be used as an opportunity to modify, improve, and add to existing transportation networks. Incorporating hazard mitigation into the repair and reconstruction of transportation facilities can ensure that when disaster strikes again, the infrastructure is better able to handle the impacts.
- *Potable water, sewer, and stormwater systems* – Damage to potable water, sewer, and stormwater infrastructure can weaken a community’s ability to recover. Like with other infrastructure, the community can take the opportunity to include hazard mitigation or other improvements during repairs. In cases of severe damage to infrastructure in highly hazardous locations, relocation could be considered. These opportunities may be missed if pre-planning is not conducted.
- *Power, natural gas, and telecommunications* – Recovery from a disaster cannot begin until major utilities, especially electricity, are restored.
- *Public facilities* – Rebuilding after a disaster provides an opportunity to mitigate future hazard impacts and build back a more resilient community. Public facilities, such as schools, libraries, and government offices must be rebuilt to current building codes. However, above-code hazard mitigation may also be a good investment, and post-disaster funding sources may allow these expenditures. Some public facilities in highly hazardous areas could potentially be targeted for relocation during pre-disaster planning.

- *Parks and recreation facilities* – While parks and recreation facilities are typically not a priority for recovery, they are important for regaining quality of life as part of long-term redevelopment. Park properties also are often used in staging recovery efforts, such as temporary vegetative debris storage.

Financing Infrastructure and Public Facilities Repair

When a community starts to make decisions about which structures to relocate after a disaster or which mitigation projects it should invest in pre-disaster, they should consider funding availability. Knowing where to prioritize spending requires some basic knowledge of what is covered under insurance policies, which projects will be eligible for federal reimbursement through the Public Assistance Program, which projects can be funded through grant programs, and what financial reserves can be targeted for grant matching funds or local investment. When a community begins to address its infrastructure issues as part of the initial planning process or as a pre-disaster implementation action, it can launch an assessment of county or municipal insurance policies to determine which facilities are covered and for what extent of damage. They can then use this assessment to make decisions about increasing coverage or financing repairs to uninsured structures. They can also determine whether mitigation enhancements would be covered under current policies and Public Assistance or whether additional funding would be needed.

Public Assistance: Improved and Alternate Projects

Occasionally an Applicant may determine that improvements should be made while restoring a damaged facility; or even that the public would not be best served by restoring a damaged facility or its function at all. FEMA refers to these projects respectively as improved and alternate. All requests for these projects must be approved prior to construction.

Possible Alternate Projects

- Repair or expansion of other public facilities;
- Construction of new public facilities;
- Purchase of capital equipment; and
- Funding of hazard mitigation measures in the area affected by the disaster.

Possible Improved Projects

- Relocation of public facilities;
- Using improved materials;
- Expanding capacity, and
- Rebuilding to higher codes and standards.

Conclusion

In the event of a disaster, Sweetgrass Development is committed to:

- Providing local officials, business leaders, and other community partners with access to regional demographic, economic, and hazard vulnerability data;

- Developing technical expertise and economic analysis tools for conducting initial disaster assessments and long-term economic impact analysis;
- Establishing collaborative relationships with local government officials and non-government organizations that may provide data, funding, technical expertise, and other resources essential to intermediate and long-term economic recovery following a disaster event;
- Offering grant writing expertise and technical assistance to regional and local entities, both for pre-disaster resiliency initiatives as well as post-disaster recovery efforts;
- Establishing familiarity with traditional economic and community recovery funding sources, including resources for business development assistance programs, such as EDA's Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) programs as well as private, nonprofit, and philanthropic resources;
- Providing technical support to impacted businesses;
- Encouraging concepts and principles of economic resiliency strategies into the existing planning and development plans and activities within the region;
- Leveraging assets; and
- Offering a neutral forum to convene diverse stakeholders and facilitate discussion and planning initiatives around the issues of economic resiliency preparedness and recovery.

Reference: Eastern Plains Economic Development Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2012-2017, Appendix E Disaster and Economic Recovery and Resiliency Strategy. Retrieved from <http://www.epedc.com/ceds.html>