Northcentral Montana

Regional Plan

2015-2035

Coordinated by

Northcentral Montana's Regional Plan provides a blueprint for achieving the vision we define for ourselves and serves as a guide as we work together to accomplish our mutual goals.

Opportunity Link, Inc.   P.O. Box 80, Havre, MT   406-265-3699   www.vibrantfuturesmt.org

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the community members of Northcentral Montana for their participation in the planning process and for the valuable feedback that they provided to inform the basis of this plan.

Thank you to the consortium members for your dedication and consistent partnership in generating community engagement, participating in the planning process, and reviewing goals and strategies within the plan.

Thank you to the Catalyst Group members who worked to turn community input into solid strategic plans for the future of our region.

Thanks to our HUD Technical Assistance providers, Minnesota Housing Partnership and Rural Community Assistance Corporation, for their expertise and guidance.

Thank you to our consultants, Applied Communications, GeoData Services, Janet Bush, MSU-Local Government Center, MSU–Western Transportation Institute, and Blue Star Studio for their efforts in helping to produce the outcomes, maps, and documents for the project.

Thanks to other HUD Sustainable Communities Grantees for their guidance, advice, and sharing of best practices. And finally, thank you to our HUD representatives for their assistance and the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities for the opportunity to conduct this 20-year planning process for the region.

Consortium Members

- Bear Paw Development Corporation
- Blackfeet Tribal Business Council
- Blaine County
- Browning Community Development Corporation
- Cascade County
- Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation
- City of Choteau
- Chouteau County
- City of Great Falls
- City of Harlem
- City of Havre
- City of Malta
- City of Shelby
- District IV Human Resources Development Council
- Fort Belknap Indian Community
- Glacier County
- Hill County
- Judith Basin County
- Liberty County
- Montana State University-Northern
- NeighborWorks Great Falls
- NeighborWorks Montana
- North Central Montana Healthy Communities Collaborative
- Opportunities Inc.
- Phillips County
- Pondera County
- Sweetgrass Development
- Teton County
- Toole County
- Town of Big Sandy
- Triangle Communications
- St. Vincent DePaul of Cascade County

Table of Contents

Chapter I Introduction

I. Overview

A. Background

In November 2011, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, awarded Opportunity Link — a regional non-profit in Northcentral Montana — a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. The Partnership, a collaborative effort between HUD, Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), works to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods

more prosperous, allow people to live closer to jobs, save households time and money, and reduce pollution.

In preparing the grant application, Opportunity Link and local leaders immediately recognized the importance of collaboration, coordinated investment, and long-term planning. With input from local leaders, Opportunity Link, on behalf of the communities of Northcentral Montana, applied for the regional planning grant to provide residents an opportunity to develop a shared vision for our future;

- ♦ Overview
- ♦ Benefits of Planning
- ♦ Planning Principles

Map 1.1: Vibrant Futures Region
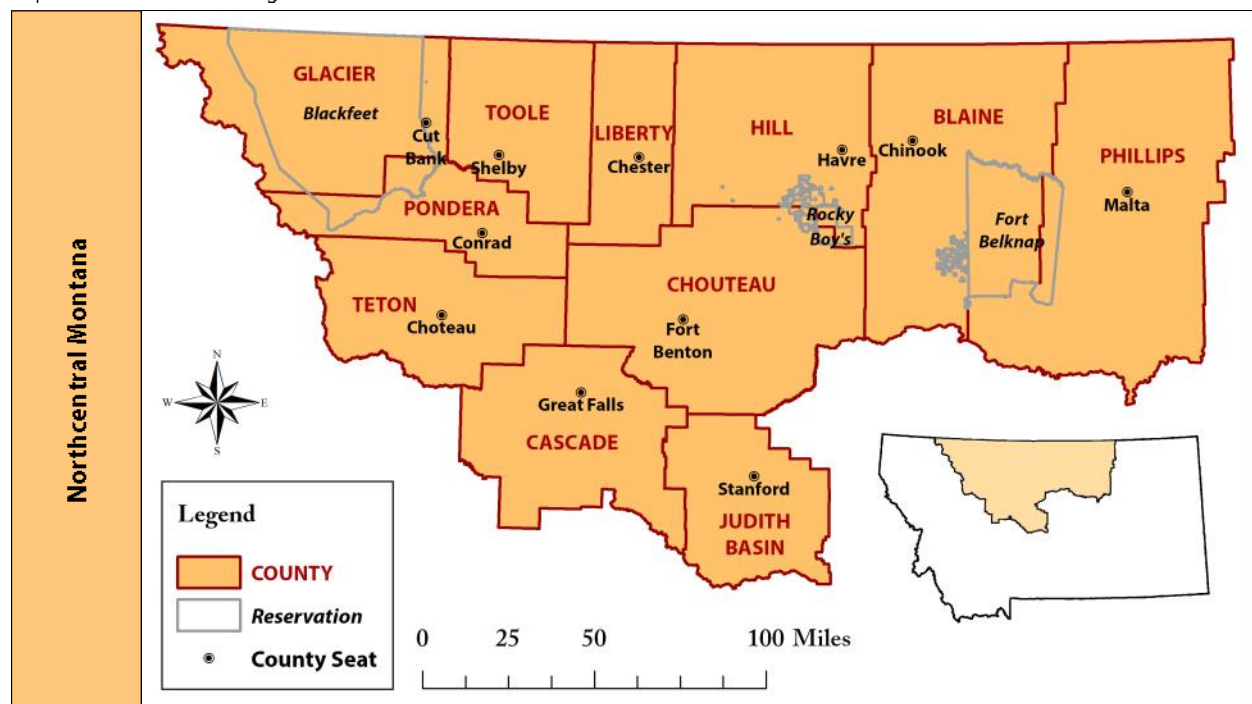
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014
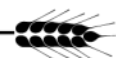
a vision that reflects our values and culture, strengthens our local economies, builds our local capacity, and maintains community character.

In February 2012, work on the three-year regional planning project officially began in the eleven county (Blaine, Cascade, Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Judith Basin, Liberty, Phillips, Pondera, Teton and Toole Counties), three Indian reservation (Blackfeet, Fort Belknap, and Rocky Boy's Reservations) region. The words *Vibrant Futures* were chosen as the title for the grant so as to encompass the inspiration and aspiration of the planning project. Over the next two years, with the help of community partners, Vibrant Futures convened local officials, neighbors, employers, workers, retirees, farmers, and youth in a series of community outreach events to gather input on preferences and hopes for the future.

Community members expressed a desire to maintain the friendly, small town character of the region where families can raise kids in a safe environment while creating communities where young adults can find good jobs and where elders can "age-in-place."

B. Planning for Change

Because our region is larger than some eastern states, we have unique challenges, such as the high cost of long-distance transportation and lack of basic services in remote areas that do not have adequate population to support a school, clinic, or grocery store. Responses to these challenges must consider diverse geographies that range from agricultural landscapes, to mountainous areas, to populated towns. Solutions must also reflect the rich cultural diversity represented by American Indian traditions, European heritages, and rural values of the American West. This diversity brings multiple perspectives to managing changes that are inevitable with the passage of time.

The region encounters change in many forms that include demographic shifts, market preferences, technological advances, and legislative initiatives. As indicated by the statistics in Figure 1.1, some of these

trends are dramatic and have occurred in just one generation. Embracing this change in order to identify opportunities, and working together as a region to respond to these changes, are underlying premises of this regional plan.

In order to safeguard what we value as a region, we must identify the challenges associated with change and offer communities a coordinated response that will help turn threats into opportunities.

Strategic responses to change, executed in ways that reflect local values and priorities, are our keys to promoting vibrant communities.

Figure1.1: Regional Trends

Indicators of Regional Change

Number of People Over Age 65
1990: 19,529*
2013: 23,000+**

School Enrollment Numbers
1983: 28,752
2013: 23,222

Population with Internet Access at Home
1990: <500*
2013: 72,000+**

Average Annual Price of Gas
1990: $1.34/gal
2013: $3.50/gal

Acres Planted in Pulse Crops
2000: 15,200
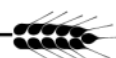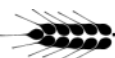*2013:* 126,000

Fair Market Rent for 2BR Apartment
2000: $500
2013: $637

*1990 Regional Population:147,136
**Estimated 2013 Regional Population :151,122

Sources: *U.S. Census Bureau*, *MT Office of Public Instruction*, *MT Broadband Program*, *U.S. Energy Information Admin*, *USDA-National Ag Statistics Service*, *U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development*

C. Planning as a Region

A regional plan that successfully prepares for change relies on combined resources from diverse communities to advance the public's vision. Residents agree that our region can accomplish great things if everyone works together. The following guidelines for cooperating as a region reflect regional input:

- Build on previous work done in communities around the region;

- Identify common needs, priorities, and aspirations;

- Include a mix of strategies that are appropriate for rural and urban communities;

- Emphasize voluntary and cooperative strategies for counties, cities, tribes, and other agencies;

- Respect existing planning documents in the region by recommending complementary goals;

- Coordinate local-to-regional-to-statewide decision making;

- Direct investment to expand economic opportunities;

- Improve the quality of life through enhancement or development of programs;

- Improve transportation, infrastructure, and communication systems.

The Vibrant Futures project supports multi-jurisdictional partnerships and an integrated approach to addressing issues of housing, transportation, health, and environment. The regional plan provides a long-term vision for the region. Recommended strategies rely on incremental development practices that will implement the vision over time. Transparency and accountability are keys to this planning process and all undertakings that result from this plan.

II. Benefits of Planning

Planning strengthens communities whether their population is growing, stable or declining. Planning has many benefits that help communities to manage change, foster resilience, and thrive while maintaining values that residents cherish.

Planning benefits, as noted in the graphic below, are derived from an inclusive planning process that relies on public input and builds on the wealth of planning documents and resources that are already in the region.

Havre along Hwy 2, Photo by Flickr user Mitch Walston

"We just need the community to pull together to improve what we have."

(Survey comment)

Figure 1.2: Benefits of Planning

Maintain Community Character
- Preserves features of established neighborhoods
- Influences design and location of new development

Conserve Beneficial Landscapes
- Protects wildlife habitat and scenic views
- Protects groundwater recharge areas and floodplains

Predictable Development
- Helps private landowners assess development costs
- Provides fair and consistent review processes
- Helps leverage funding for public improvements

Protects Property Rights
- Assists homebuyers in making investment based on future plans for the area
- Minimizes negative impact from incompatible development

Promotes Fiscal Responsibility
- Prevents spending public dollars on unneeded facilities
- Locates new growth to use fire and police services more effectively
- Supports more cost efficient design

Promotes Economic Development
- Plans for infrastructure to attract new business
- Provides market information to support business investment

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

III. Planning Principles

Certain planning principles have been shown to help communities achieve the benefits from planning that were identified in Figure 1.2. These principles are based on an integrated approach to housing, land use, economic development, transportation, and infrastructure investments. They recognize that when multiple jurisdictions within a region work together, communities are better positioned to manage change and address new challenges. Following are the planning principles identified by local residents as a basis for crafting goals and objectives:

- **Support existing communities.** Promote community revitalization efforts and the efficiency of public investments through housing rehabilitation, community planning, preserving local heritage, and maintaining community character.

- **Value safe communities and neighborhoods.** Support healthy communities by removing hazards, creating convenient and attractive pedestrian options, and not tolerating criminal behavior.

- **Enhance economic competitiveness.** Improve economic competitiveness by diversifying the economy and promoting business development through workforce education, providing adequate infrastructure, and supporting growth industries.

- **Promote affordable housing.** Increase the inventory of energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, and communities and engage in planning that lowers the combined cost of housing, energy, and transportation.

- **Provide transportation choices.** Develop safe, reliable, and affordable transportation choices to improve mobility for youth, elders, people with disabilities and non-drivers within the region.

- **Coordinate policies and leverage investment.** Promote collaborative efforts among communities and leverage multiple funding sources while increasing the effectiveness of all levels of government to manage change for the future.

Chapter II Planning Process

Chapter II Planning Process

I. Overview

### A. Inclusive, Transparent, and Accountable

Development of this plan was based on a fully inclusive planning process that relied on input from both community leaders and residents of Northcentral Montana. Like other planning processes, the Regional Plan only works if it reflects the concerns and desires of the residents whom it serves. In order to obtain resident input in all stages of development, the planning process relied on multiple public participation methods. As noted in the map below, meetings were held across the region to offer opportunities for residents to share their concerns and ideas for the future of Northcentral Montana.

Throughout the process, residents had the opportunity to stay informed about the project through the Vibrant Futures website and social media tools. The website also offered opportunities to provide input on the plan through interactive web-based applications.

Additionally, consortium members recommended representatives for a 12-member Advisory Council. The Advisory Council included representatives of county, municipal, and tribal governments; development organizations; and non-profits. Advisory
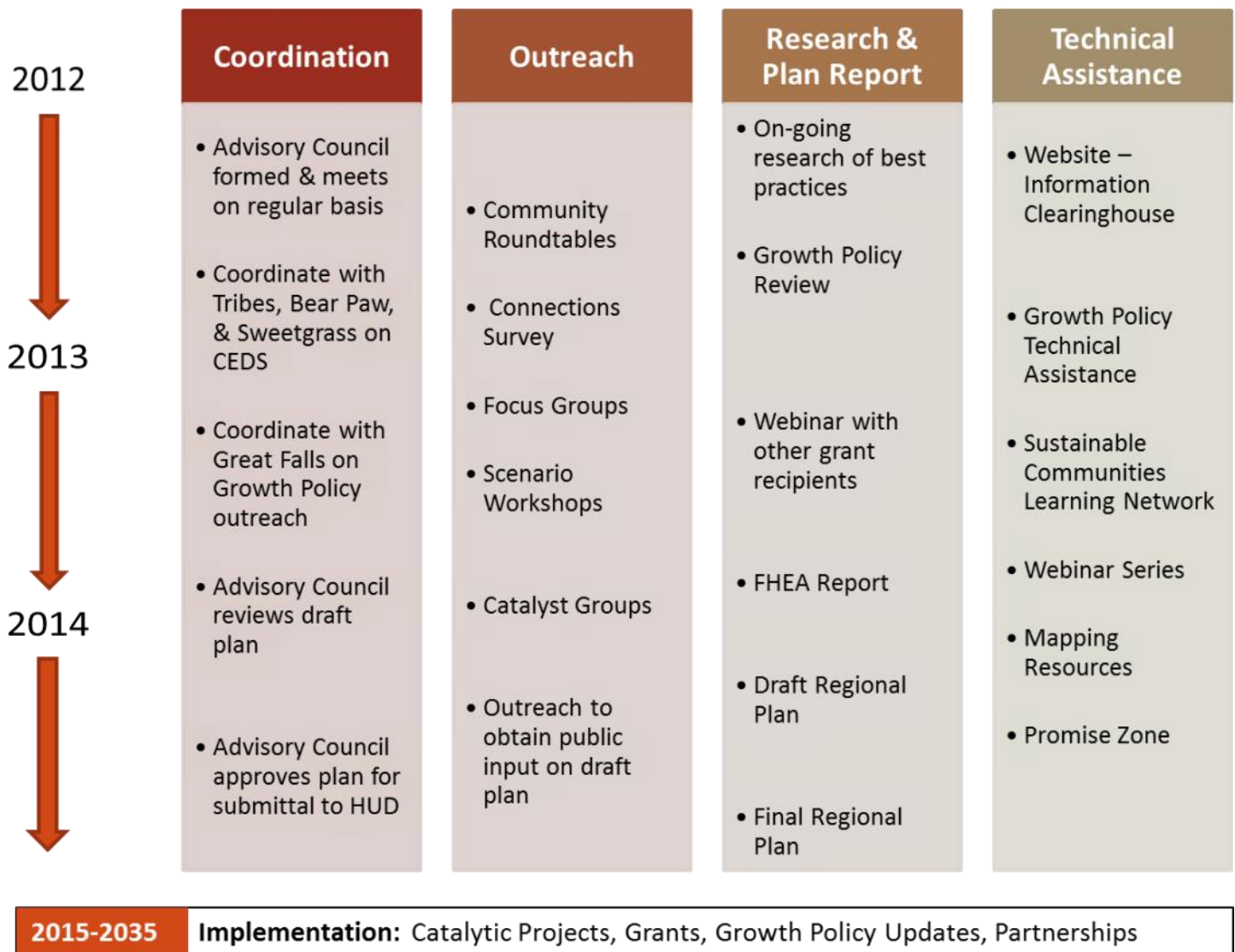
Map 2.1: Community Meeting Locations
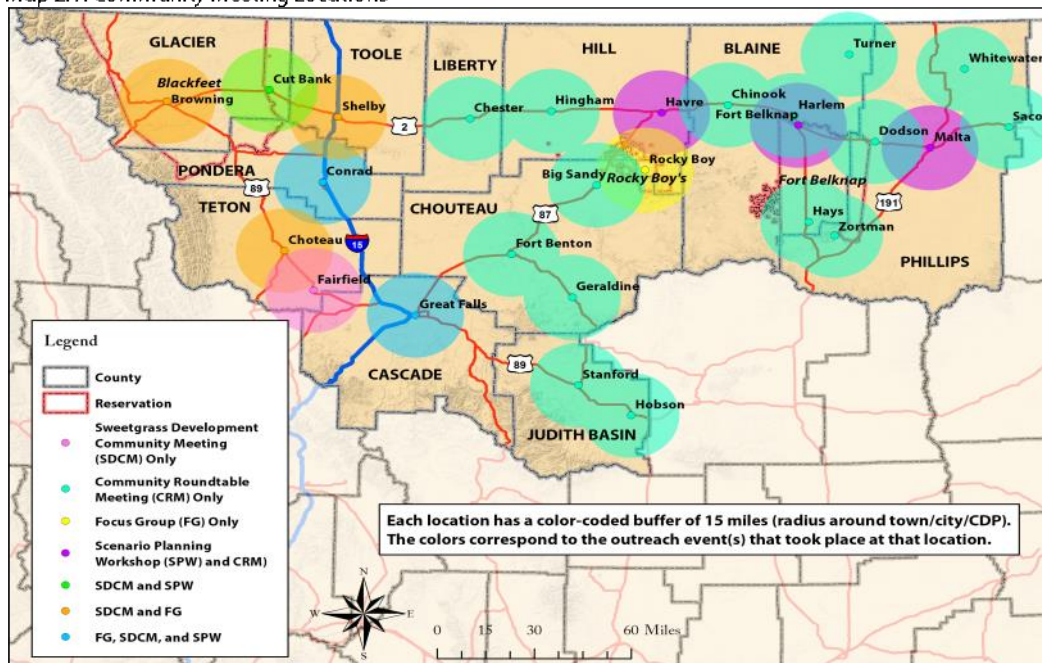
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

Council members provided leadership and brought transparency and accountability to the project. The Council met in person and via electronic media to direct the work of staff and consultants, hear feedback from public meetings, and review emerging data. Members of the council worked together to resolve issues and build consensus on regional sustainability goals. The final approval process for the regional plan rested with the Advisory Council.

The three-year planning process began in 2012. Approval of the final plan took place in 2014, and implementation of the plan will take place over the next 20 years and will continue to rely on the involvement of local leaders and residents to identify projects and modify the plan as times change. The figure below illustrates multiple project components that ran on parallel timelines throughout the planning process.

Figure 2.1: Planning Timeline

	Coordination	Outreach	Research & Plan Report	Technical Assistance
2012 → **2013** → **2014** →	• Advisory Council formed & meets on regular basis • Coordinate with Tribes, Bear Paw, & Sweetgrass on CEDS • Coordinate with Great Falls on Growth Policy outreach • Advisory Council reviews draft plan • Advisory Council approves plan for submittal to HUD	• Community Roundtables • Connections Survey • Focus Groups • Scenario Workshops • Catalyst Groups • Outreach to obtain public input on draft plan	• On-going research of best practices • Growth Policy Review • Webinar with other grant recipients • FHEA Report • Draft Regional Plan • Final Regional Plan	• Website – Information Clearinghouse • Growth Policy Technical Assistance • Sustainable Communities Learning Network • Webinar Series • Mapping Resources • Promise Zone

2015-2035	**Implementation:** Catalytic Projects, Grants, Growth Policy Updates, Partnerships

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

II. Public Input

Vibrant Futures conducted a wide ranging, multi-year, public outreach effort. The City of Great Falls; Phillco Economic Growth Council; Bear Paw, Snowy Mountain, and Sweetgrass Development Corporations; and the Blackfeet, Chippewa Cree, and Fort Belknap tribal planning offices; assisted with planning, outreach, and facilitation in their sub-regions. The outreach efforts included the following:

Project Partner Meetings

Some project partners were concurrently conducting or had recently completed a planning process. The input from these meetings was documented, shared, and incorporated into this plan. These included:

- A series of community meetings held by Sweetgrass Development in their 5-county region as part of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) planning process;

- A series of community and workgroup meetings the City of Great Falls was completing for the Imagine Great Falls 2025, 2013 Growth Policy Update;

- And, a series of community meetings the Blackfeet Tribe was completing to update their CEDS.

Community Roundtables

To respect and complement the work that had been done in the western half of the region, Vibrant Futures staff worked with Bear Paw and Snowy Mountain Development Corporations and the Chippewa Cree and Fort Belknap Tribal Planning Departments to convene 21 Community Roundtables in the eastern half of the region. The roundtable meetings were organized around three hands-on activities during which participants identified important values, budget priorities, and community action items. A total of 440 residents participated in the meetings.
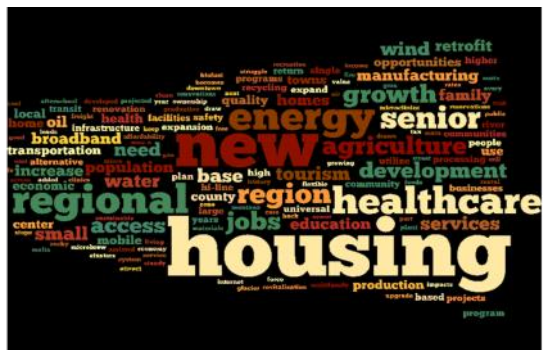

Chinook resident shares community needs

Budget prioritization activity

Rocky Boy meeting participants completing surveys

Wordle showing community priorities based on meeting input

Focus Groups

Following the roundtable meetings, Vibrant Futures conducted focus groups targeting underrepresented perspectives (elderly, youth, low-income, and residents of extremely rural areas). We took an "affirmative inquiry" approach by requesting that respondents consider three questions about their community: (1) What is working? (2) What is not working? (3) What can we do to make it better? A total of 111 people participated.

Connections Survey

Over 400 residents from across the region completed the Vibrant Futures Connections Survey (347 in person; 58 online). Respondents selected their home site and then selected their primary locality for employment, adult and child education, grocery and household shopping, dining out, recreation, routine health care, emergency health care, specialized health care, and auto repair. The responses were coded to generate spider maps that illustrate extensive transportation-based social and economic networks linking distant communities. The respondents also ranked a list of community development topics by importance .

Scenario Workshops

In March 2013, Vibrant Futures held Scenario Workshops in six different locations across the region (Cut Bank, Conrad, Great Falls, Havre, Fort Belknap Agency, and Malta). Participants included community leaders, non-profit staff, elected officials, government planners, and interested residents. Vibrant Futures presented resident feedback from the Community Roundtables and surveys, and used spider maps to illustrate the hub-and-satellite relationships between reservations, small towns, and larger cities. Workshop participants engaged in mapping activities to draw existing regional-level projects on printed maps, further illustrating the interconnectedness of distant communities across the region. Small group discussion activities identified high priority action areas and

potential catalytic projects. The input was used to develop scenarios using CommunityViz software.

Expert Groups and Catalyst Groups

As part of the scenario planning process, six expert groups were convened for a series of webinars to identify important planning trends and data that should be incorporated into the scenario-planning model. Following completion of the scenario planning workshops, experts were convened into topic-specific catalysts groups (Economic/Agriculture, Physical and Natural Resources, and Social) to review the input and use the CommunityViz scenarios to recommend goals and objectives for the plans.

Scenario workshop participants discuss overlapping opportunities during Venn Diagram exercise.

Scenario workshop participants tab existing services during mapping exercise

III. Regional Resources

A. Growth Policy Analysis

Another technique for discerning regional values and common issues was a review of existing county and municipal growth policies. This provided valuable information for regional planning, such as:

- Identification of important planning issues, common trends, and local priorities;

- Identification of examples of sustainability strategies being incorporated into growth policies;

- And, establishment of quantitative benchmarks for evaluating program goals.

A total of 23 growth policies from counties and municipalities across the region were examined as part of the planning process. The examined growth policies were developed with extensive public input through town meetings, open houses, steering committees, surveys, workshops, and public hearings. These planning documents were useful in identifying regional priorities and provided information on what types of training, technical assistance, data, and best practices would be most effective to ensure that partners are successful in securing investments and applying for grants or loans. As shown in Figure 2.2, local growth policies were less likely to have goals and objectives that addressed elements such as population, natural resources, and local services than other required elements of the Montana Code Annotated. The regional plan will provide guidance on how to address these issues.

B. Other Resources

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is the result of a local planning process designed to guide the economic growth of an area. A CEDS is required to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) assistance under its public works, economic adjustment, and most planning programs and is a prerequisite for designation by EDA as an Economic Development District (EDD).

There are three certified Economic Development Districts in the region with adopted CEDS, including Bear Paw Development, Sweetgrass Development and Snowy Mountain Development Corporations. Additionally, Fort Belknap, Blackfeet, and Rocky Boy's Reservations have CEDS. The CEDS were reviewed to identify economic opportunities, common issues, and regional goals.

In addition to the CEDS, other types of regional planning documents that were reviewed included regional health assessments, transportation studies, facility plans, housing needs assessments, source water assessments, and pre-disaster mitigation plans.

Figure 2.2: Number of Growth Policies containing goals and trends for fulfilling Montana Code Annotated requirements
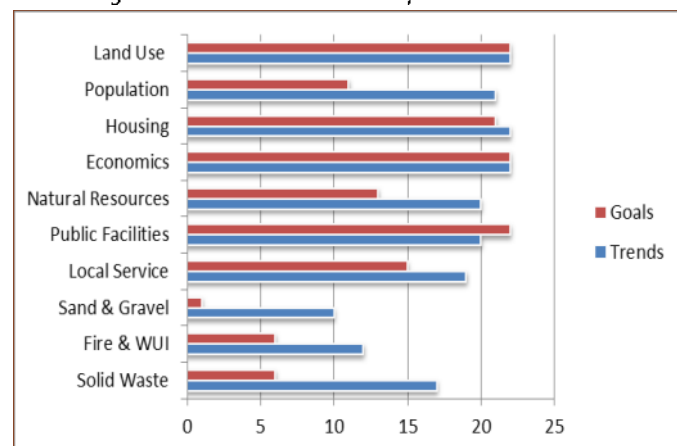
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2013

Figure 2.3: Example of the Health Assessment data that was reviewed in developing the Regional Plan
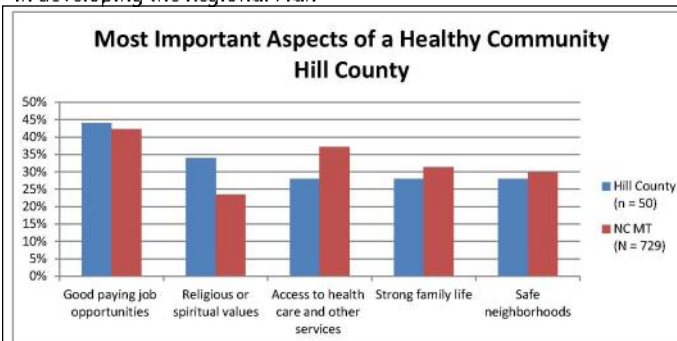
Hill County Community Health Needs Assessment Report, 2013

IV. Analysis

A. Areas of Focus

The analysis of public input was completed in two steps. The first step determined the most common topics, or Areas of Focus, that were expressed by people in the region. Since there were multiple avenues of gathering public input, different methods of analyses were used to identify the most frequently referenced topics. These methods included:

- **Linguistic analysis**- A linguistic analysis of the narrative transcriptions for the "What We Can Do" exercise showed the most frequently occurring words 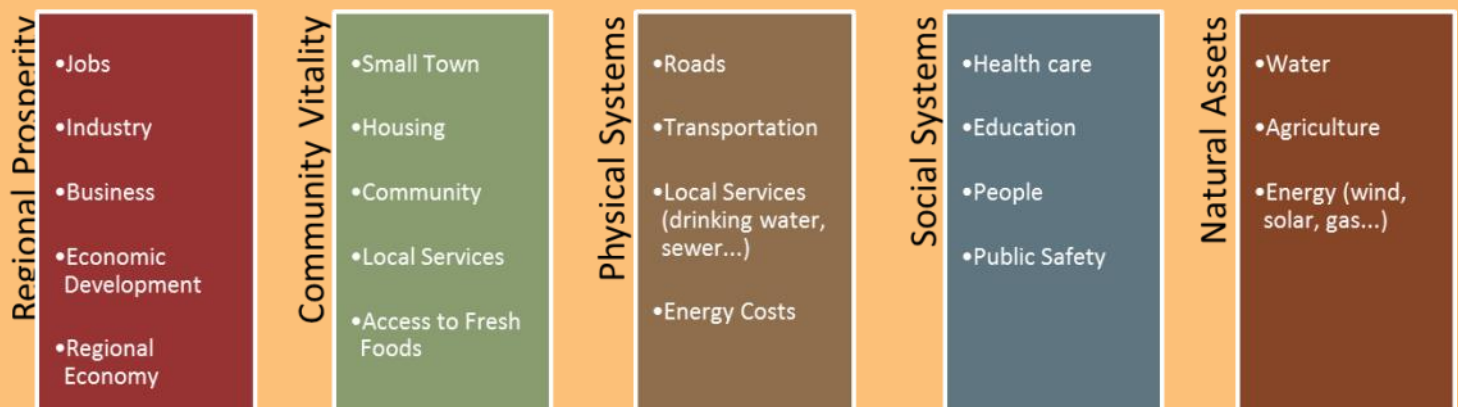and word groups. This analysis was completed for the group brainstorm activity at the community roundtable meetings and on public input generated from the Sweetgrass CEDS and the Great Falls Growth Policy.

- **Word clouds**– Similar to the linguistic analysis, word clouds graphically depict the most frequently occurring words. This analysis was completed for words that community roundtable participants wrote to describe regional values.

- **Survey rankings**– Participants completing the Connections Survey ranked twelve sustainability indicators in terms of importance. The rankings were compiled to identify the top six indicators.

- **Budget spending priorities**- Community roundtable participants were given $100 of play money to allocate among seven types of public services. This indicated which services were priorities for the spending of public dollars.

- **Overlapping priority analysis**- The scenario workshops included an activity that encouraged small groups to identify three priority areas and develop actions for each of those areas. Priority areas were determined based on the results of this activity.

The analysis indicated that some terms and phrases were frequently used in each type of activity. The terms that were most common have been grouped according to five themes. These Areas of Focus will provide a framework for developing the goals and strategies in this document.

Figure 2.4: Themes and Areas of Focus from VF Public Input

Regional Prosperity
- Jobs
- Industry
- Business
- Economic Development
- Regional Economy

Community Vitality
- Small Town
- Housing
- Community
- Local Services
- Access to Fresh Foods

Physical Systems
- Roads
- Transportation
- Local Services (drinking water, sewer...)
- Energy Costs

Social Systems
- Health care
- Education
- People
- Public Safety

Natural Assets
- Water
- Agriculture
- Energy (wind, solar, gas...)

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

B. Solutions Analysis

While the first type of analysis identified the common Areas of Focus, the second part of the public outreach analysis concentrated on solutions or action steps that can be applied to these areas. For example, housing was identified as an important issue in the region. Although a wide range of goals and objectives can be suggested to address housing issues, the underlying premise of this plan is that resident and policy-maker recommendations represent the priorities of citizens and leaders in the region. In order to determine these priorities, we compared what we heard from all the engagement, outreach, and decision-making activities during the Vibrant Futures planning process with outcomes, goals, and priorities from other local and regional planning documents. This second analysis validates the priorities of residents by building on previous work done in communities around the region. The figure below identifies common solutions and recommends complementary goals that are most likely to be implemented. The following inputs were considered as part of this analysis:

- Community Roundtable/Focus Group Project Recommendations
- Scenario Workshop Project Recommendations
- Growth Policy Review
- CEDS
- Connections Survey – Narrative Response
- Community Ventures Project
- HUD Livability Principles

Top planning priorities were generated from an analysis of all the inputs listed above. Similar ideas were combined and labeled. The labeled headings were then assigned to one of the five Areas of Focus. A matrix was developed to document the sources of input for suggested actions in each category.

Figure 2.5: Example of the Policy Analysis Matrix for the Regional Prosperity Theme

Theme	Solution	Community Meetings	Scenario Workshops	Growth Policy Review	CEDS	Surveys	Catalyst & Expert Groups	Community Ventures	U.S. HUD
Regional Prosperity	Business – Job Growth	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
	Tourism	X	X	X	X		X	X	
	Workforce Training	X				X	X	X	X
	Entrepreneurship			X	X			X	
	Downtown/Main Street	X	X	X					
	Broadband/Internet	X		X			X	X	
	Renewable Energy	X	X	X	X		X		X
	Oil and Gas				X		X		

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

According to the analysis of community input and planning documents, a focus on the following categories would help sustain a vibrant future for Northcentral Montana (tiered according to frequency with which mentioned):

Figure 2.5: Community Areas of Focus

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Business, job growth	Renewable energy	Entrepreneurship
Tourism	Road network	Downtown/Main Street
New housing	Education	Oil and gas
Affordable housing	Workforce training	Senior housing
Housing rehab	Broadband	Fair housing
Parks, trails, recreation	Transit	Energy efficiency
Cultural heritage	Drinking water	Healthy neighborhoods
Local government services	Public health, wellness	Commercial services
Healthcare	Youth, families	Sidewalks and trails
		Wastewater upgrades
		Infrastructure financing
		Aging services
		Local foods
		Land use patterns
		Sustainable agriculture
		Land stewardship

C. How to Use This Analysis

For the purposes of creating a coherent regional vision, the upcoming chapters summarize key areas of regional history, community-level data, resident input, and local growth policies. For more extensive and detailed descriptions of each of these areas, please refer to the Appendices.

Vibrant Futures encourages local planners to use our community-specific data to inform municipal, tribal, and county planning. All of the detail-rich data generated by residents about perceived strengths, needs, priorities, and strategies is available for local use. While we found regional unanimity around community values and general agreement on the overriding priorities of economic development and housing, there was variation among communities regarding lesser priorities and community-specific strategies. Resident input for each community, including prioritization of public spending, suggested solutions to problems, and a vision of the future, are on the Vibrant Futures website.

V. Technical Assistance

One component of the regional planning process was to build capacity within the region. To do this, Opportunity Link offered training and technical assistance opportunities to community members and project partners through:

- **The Information Clearinghouse** – Links to planning related resources are available on the Vibrant Futures website.
- **Growth Policy Technical Assistance** - Communities were invited to schedule one-on-one consultations to assist with growth policy updates.
- **Webinars** - A series of educational webinars on planning topics is available on the website.
- **Mapping Resources** – Vibrant Futures has prepared county maps that can be downloaded as PDF files and included in Growth Policy updates.
- **Sustainable Communities Learning Network** - Organizations and project partners that received a HUD Sustainable Communities Grant are eligible to access this online service which provides resources on developing more sustainable, prosperous, and equitable communities.

Chapter III Regional Context

I. Defining the Region

A. Introduction

Although our territory is vast in size, it has features that define it as a cohesive region. Residents share the geography and extreme climate conditions from the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains in the west to the Great Plains in the east.

Socially, we share the common frontier histories and contemporary concerns of resident American Indian tribes and European settlers. Many of our social values reflect the traditions of rural lifestyles and the American West. Economically, the region provides a web of closely linked "hub" communities that offer commercial, transportation, and health care services.

Rural schools are consolidated into districts. Farmers transport wheat to central grain elevators for storage and shipping. Consumers travel to cities within the region for shopping and entertainment. Neighboring counties and tribes share key infrastructure and service projects, such as the Rocky Boy's/North Central Montana Regional Water System and North Central Montana Transit.

Our shared geography, history, industries, landscapes, and hub communities unite us as a cohesive cultural and economic region with a unique identity, an identity that we, as residents, value and seek to preserve.

Figure 3.1: Northcentral Montana Land Area Comparison
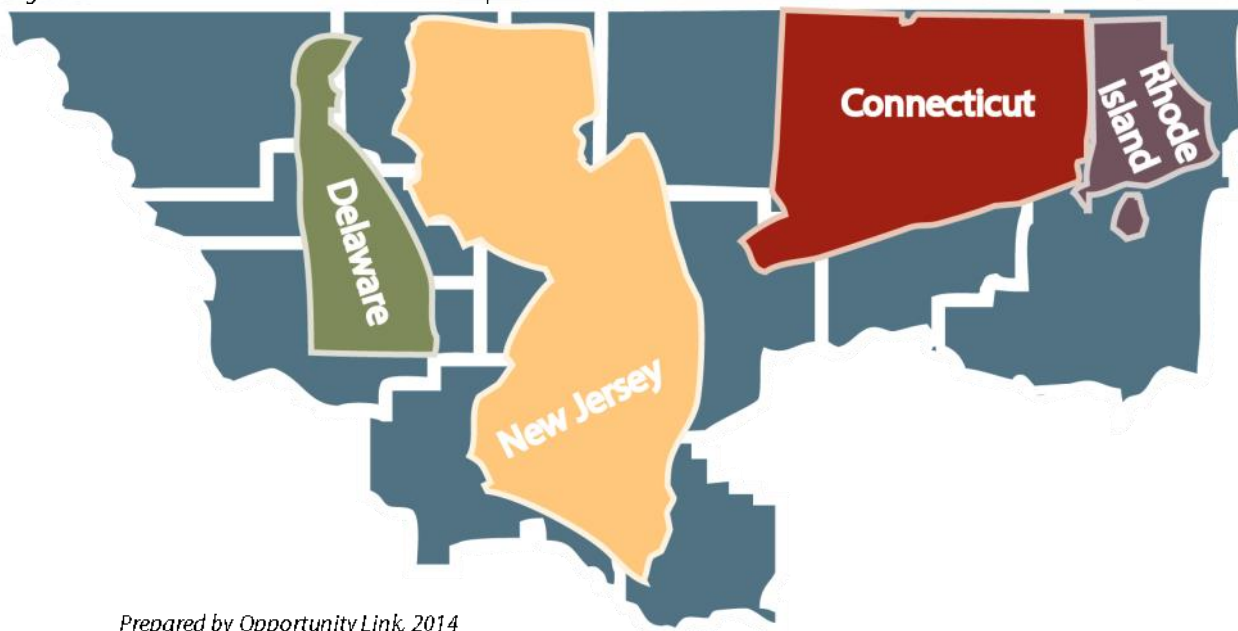
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

B. Geographical Features

The region stretches 315 miles from the border of Glacier National Park in the Rocky Mountains to the eastern edge of Phillips County on the mixed-grass prairie. This region is known for its fertile wheat farms and expansive cattle ranches. It includes 11 counties and three Indian reservations; a metropolitan center, Great Falls, is the largest city in the region with a population of around 58,000 people. According to the guidelines of the National Rural Health Association, all counties excepting metro Cascade County are categorized as "frontier," or having less than six persons per square mile.[1,2]

The Rocky Mountains create our western boundary, while the Canadian border defines our northern boundary. The Missouri River, once a powerful transportation artery into the region, passes through four of our counties and forms the southern border for Blaine and Phillips counties. The landmass within these boundaries is referred to as the "Golden Triangle" because it leads the state in wheat production. In addition to farming and ranching, industries with historical and contemporary significance include mining, railroad transportation, energy production, and military services.

Map 3.1: Regional Boundaries and Geographic Features
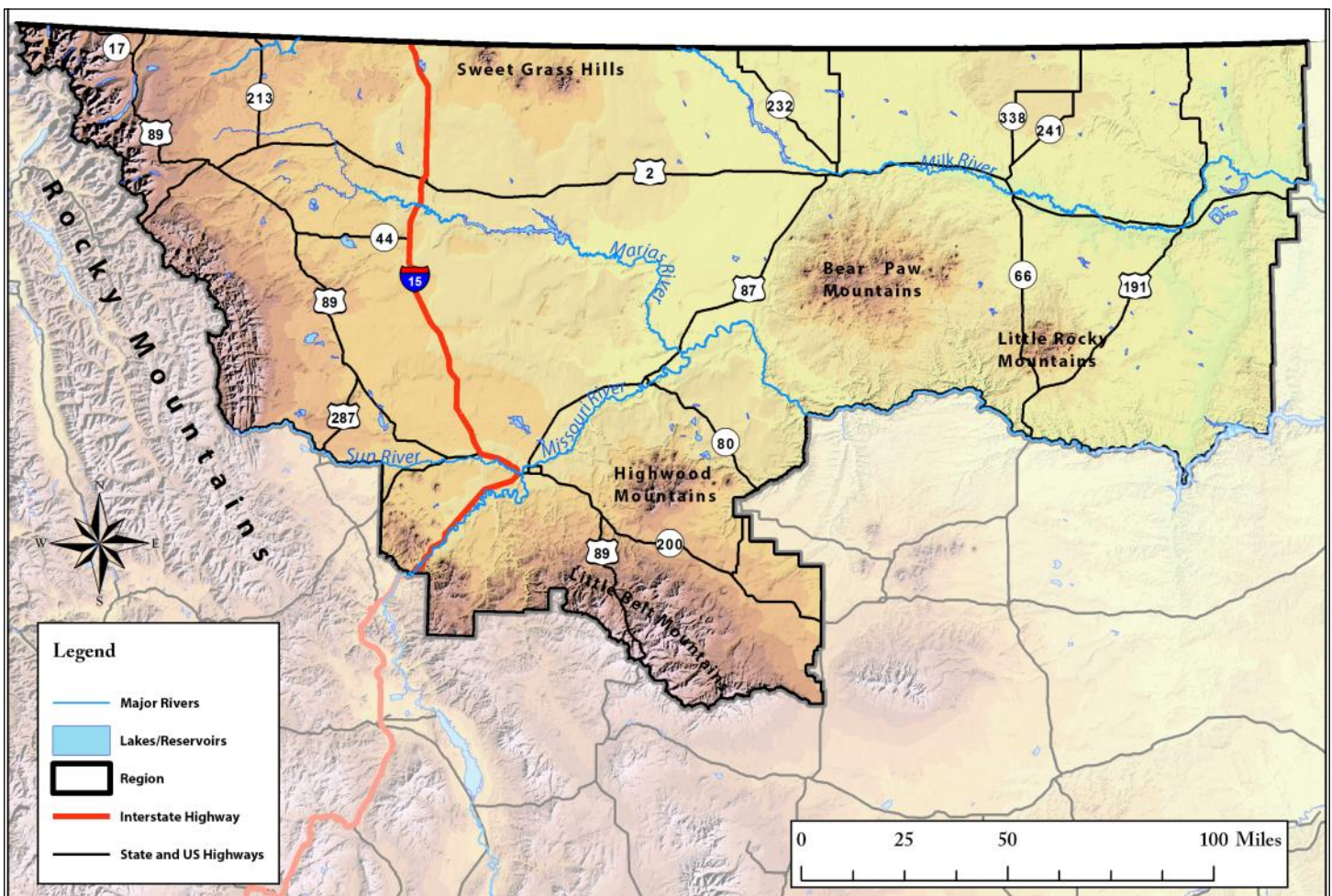
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

C. Networked by Transportation

Settlement patterns in Northcentral Montana followed transportation routes. Historically, American Indians traveled a network of trails and rivers across the region for hunting and trade. The first European settlement in the state, Fort Benton, was located at the northernmost navigable port on the Missouri River. Traveled by Lewis and Clark in 1805, the Missouri later served as the destination for paddle-wheel steamboats from New Orleans. Cavalry, miners, and settlers disembarked at Fort Benton to travel by horseback and covered wagon into the plains and mountains of the region and beyond.

The Great Northern Railway brought industry and homesteaders to the region. European immigrants rushed to take advantage of affordable land in the early 1900s, and found that the work of a dryland farmer was more challenging than the railroad pro-motions had promised. As the northernmost rail line in the West (now operated by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway), paralleled by east-west U.S. Highway 2, this route is known to residents as the "Hi-Line."

The I-15 corridor that transects the region is a port of entry and serves as a major transportation route between Canada and Mexico. In total, there are 6 ports of entry along the northern border. U.S. Highways 89 and 87 connect our rural areas with the major regional hub of Great Falls and with smaller commercial hubs located at heavily traveled highway intersections. Today, these two-lane highways are the primary transportation routes that support trade, commerce, and connections among residents of distant communities. Several rural transit systems support intercity travel between the Hi-Line and Great Falls.

In addition to highway travel, passenger air travel is provided at the Great Falls International Airport and the Havre City-County Airport, an Essential Air Service provider. Amtrak offers passenger rail service twice daily with stops in Browning, Cut Bank, Havre, Malta, and Shelby.

Bull Team, Fort Benton 1880- Montana State University Library

Burlington Northern Santa Fe transporting goods along the Hi-Line

I15 Exit in Great Falls

North Central Montana Transit providing service along the Hi-Line.

D. Regional Economy

The region has a diverse economy based on a strong agricultural sector in all 11 counties and a manufacturing base in Great Falls. Federal, tribal, county, and municipal governments provide a significant number of jobs in the military and law enforcement, homeland security, public services, colleges, and schools. Growing private sectors include health care, tourism, and agribusiness. The energy cluster—oil and gas exploration, hydropower, and renewable energy—is a potential growth sector in the region.

Bear Paw Development Corporation, based in Havre, serves Blaine, Chouteau, Hill, Liberty, and Phillips Counties and Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations. Sweetgrass Development, based in

Great Falls, serves Cascade, Glacier, Pondera, Toole, and Teton Counties and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. Snowy Mountain Development Corporation serves Judith Basin County. These agencies, along with the Tribes, have completed Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) that provide detailed analysis of economic conditions, threats, and opportunities.

Throughout the region, residents share economic goals of providing infrastructure, housing, and labor force to support a more diversified economy. They want to attract new, good-paying jobs to the region and provide commercial services that will entice their young families to stay here.

Figure 3.2: Economic Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- Housing (costs, supply, condition)
- Eroding water, sewer, road infrastructure
- Transportation costs
- Flood/drought
- Labor force shortage related to depopulation
- Attracting young families and young professionals
- National trends (commodity prices, farm policies, recession, decreased federal spending)

Opportunities

- Higher education facilities
- Energy cluster growth
- Tourism growth
- Investment in transit
- Agri-business cluster
- North Central Montana Regional Water System
- MSU Northern technical and research programs
- Brownfield programs
- Workforce development

Source: Compiled from Regional CEDS, Opportunity Link, 2012

II. Regional History

A. American Indian Homelands

Northcentral Montana includes three Indian Reservations. The Blackfeet Reservation is the homeland of the Blackfeet Nation; the Fort Belknap Reservation is the homeland of the Gros Ventre (Aaniiih) and Assiniboine (Nakoda) tribes of the Fort Belknap Indian Community; Rocky Boy's Reservation is reserved for the Chippewa-Cree Tribe. The landless Little Shell Tribe, headquartered in Great Falls, is currently seeking federal tribal recognition. Tribal histories, traditional cultures, and reservation economies are integral to the health and wellbeing of the region. The unique history of each reservation is reflected in its contemporary economy, government, and institutions.

Both the Blackfeet Reservation (in present-day Glacier and Pondera Counties) and the Fort Belknap Reservation (in Blaine and Phillips Counties) were set aside as sovereign territories by treaty agreement in the mid-1800s. Subsequently, boundaries of both reservations were altered when the federal government sought access for mining and settlement. Some of the moved boundaries are contested today as tribes seek restoration of their original treatied territories and the clear authority to determine land use there.

The Allotment Act of 1887 limited Indian ownership of reservation land and opened reservations to white settlement. This gave rise to the contemporary "checkerboard" pattern of Indian and non-Indian land ownership on Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Reservations and continues to influence land use and development.

In contrast, the Rocky Boy's Reservation was established in 1916 by Executive Order for Chippewa and Cree Indians. Because it was not subject to the Allotment Act, its contiguous area is primarily intact and under single ownership of tribal government, who holds it in trust for tribal members.

Under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1935, Northcentral Montana's Indian tribes adopted the constitutions that dictate governance today. Tribal Councils or Business Committees are designated managers of both political and business matters. These elected bodies oversee planning, development, and land use decisions that govern reservation communities.

B. European Settlement

Following the Lewis and Clark Expedition, federal forts were established on the Missouri River and overland trails. The forts acted as both military stations and trading posts. Over time, European settlers arrived to the region by boat, covered wagon, and railroad. The Great Northern Railway received a federal land grant in 1887 to extend its reach to the Pacific Coast. "Water Stops," where the Milk River provided an abundant water supply, sprang up along the Hi-Line to provide labor and resources for railroad operations.

Shortly thereafter, the town of Great Falls was plotted by founder Paris Gibson, who saw potential for hydroelectric power near the falls of the Missouri River. When the railroad was extended to Great Falls, connecting it to other cities in the state, the city emerged as an industrial center with the Anaconda Company copper smelter as a major employer.

Top Left: Blackfeet Tribal Seal and photo of Blackfeet women outside a craft shop in Browning, MT– Montana State University Library

2nd Left: Chippewa Cree Tribal Seal and photo of Chief Rocky Boy at camp– Chippewa Cree Cultural Resource Preservation Department

3rd Left: Fort Belknap Tribal Seal and photo of dancers at Fort Belknap Pow Wow– Montana State University Library

Top Right: 1918, Women in Great Falls, MT working for Great Northern Railway during WWI– U.S. National Archives and Records Administration Online Public Access

Bottom Row (L to R): Old Mill, Zortman Mine-Photo courtesy of C. Kalal; 1913, Wagon pulled by horses in Havre, MT– Montana State University Library; Steamboat carrying passengers on the Missouri– Montana Department of Transportation

C. Regional Economic "Boom, Bust" Cycles

Historically, Northcentral Montana's economic development has occurred in cycles of "boom and bust" caused by changing natural and market conditions. The Enlarged Homestead Acts of 1909 and 1910 spurred population growth. Homesteaders embraced the principles of dryland farming, which promised that proper cultivation of semi-arid land could conserve land-locked moisture.[3] The railroad opened shipping of beef cattle to cities in the Midwest, supporting the emerging ranching industry. Discovery of gold and other precious minerals in mountains and badlands brought the mining industry to the region.

Populations in rural counties began to decline after 1910 in response to drought, the outbreak of World War I, and the Great Depression. A national pattern of rural-to-urban migration began, which continues to affect Northcentral Montana to this day.

After World War II, agricultural production increased and the national "baby boom" expanded population numbers. Malmstrom Air Force Base was established in Great Falls in 1939 and grew as a regional employer through the 1970s.

A series of economic changes in the 1980s caused loss of jobs in the region: ARCO (previously the Anaconda Company) closed its Great Falls copper smelter; Malmstrom Air Force Base was downsized; and farms consolidated and mechanized. Industry-level changes transformed agricultural communities and brought lasting economic change to the region. Across the Great Plains, rural schools and commercial services consolidated to larger communities, causing small towns to lose jobs and Main Street businesses. Many nonmetropolitan counties and municipalities in rural states suffered reduced tax bases.

Montana's per capita income was low in the 1980s compared to other states but has increased through the 2000s so that, in 2003, we ranked 44th among the 50 states and, in 2013, we ranked 35th.[4,5] Strong agricultural production and proximity to Bakken oil production are credited with helping to improve Northcentral Montana's recent economic outlook.

Overshot haystacker-Montana Historical Society, Agriculture Collection

Anaconda Copper Mining Plant, Great Falls– USGen Web Archives

D. Northcentral Montana Today

Historic challenges brought residents together and instilled a sense of community that is still evident today. Residents value the small town atmosphere, closely knit communities, and spirit of cooperation that reflect their shared history. As we look to the future, we see opportunities and challenges that we will confront with the same "can do" attitude. The following trends highlight some of the issues that we currently face.

Demographic Trends- Population Change

Today, three distinct demographic trends affect the region. These trends inform planning and development of goals in anticipation of reversing or accommodating the trends. Communities are able to focus on these goals in seeking new opportunities to attract jobs and support residents.

First, non-metro, non-reservation counties, which have lost residents since the homesteading days, are either continuing slow population decline or leveling off. Rural populations are older on average than metro and reservation counties. They are now encountering new housing and health care needs.

Second, reservation counties demonstrate stable or growing populations. Reservation populations grew in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s due to strong birth rates and in-migration. This growth brings an urgent need for employment, housing, health care services, youth services, and education. In the 1970s and 1980s, tribes undertook leadership of reservation school districts and established tribal community colleges. Education services generate jobs while preparing students for continued education and employment.

Third, after experiencing population reduction in the 1980s due to the loss of industry, metropolitan Cascade County and the City of Great Falls have begun to regain population. Smaller cities like Havre and Shelby are stable or growing. There is new oil and gas expansion in Canada and North Dakota which increases regional travel and trade.

The work that provided the basis for this publication was supported by funding under an award with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The substance and findings of the work are dedicated to the public. The author and publisher are solely responsible for the accuracy of the statements and interpretations contained in this publication. Such

Figure 3.3: Population change in non-metro, non-reservation counties
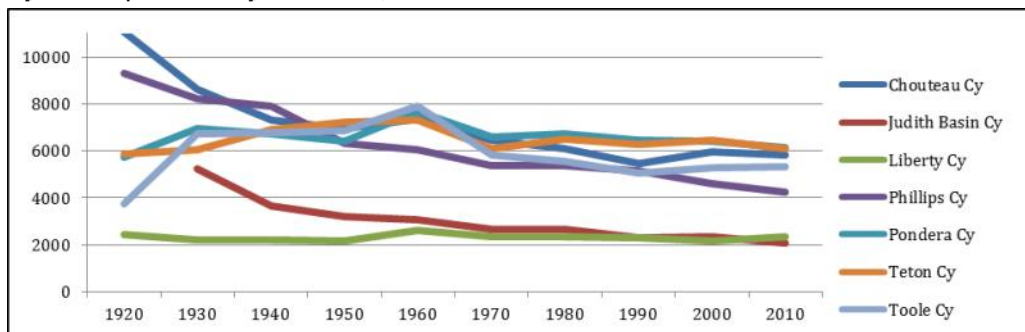

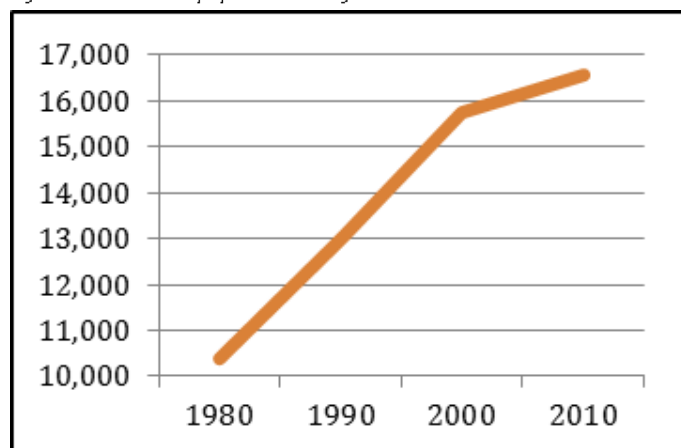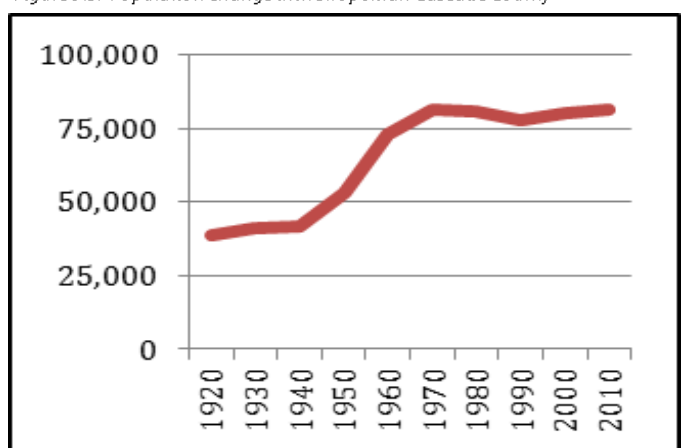Figure 3.4: Combined population change of reservation counties

Figure 3.5: Population change in metropolitan Cascade County

interpretations do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government."

Economic Trends- Income, Poverty , Employment
Income

In general, median incomes in rural counties are lower than the statewide median income. Reservation median incomes are lower than those of surrounding counties.[6] Although reservation incomes rose slightly over the past decade, they rose significantly less than in rural counties.

Table 3.1: Trends in median household income

RESERVATION	2000 (USCB)	2005-2009 (USCB)	% CHANGE
Blackfeet	$30,741	$33,774	9.9%
Fort Belknap	$26,474	$25,536	-3.5%
Rocky Boy's	$28,032	$29,934	6.8%
COUNTY	2000 (USCB)	2010 (USCB)	% CHANGE
Blaine	$26,157	$36,562	39.8%
Cascade	$33,819	$42,525	25.7%
Chouteau	$30,054	$38,106	26.8%
Glacier	$27,049	$33,766	24.8%
Hill	$32,043	$42,014	31.1%
Judith Basin	$29,704	$37,657	26.8%
Liberty	$29,505	$35,769	21.2%
Phillips	$29,414	$37,217	26.5%
Pondera	$30,569	$37,218	21.8%
Teton	$31,351	$39,479	25.9%
Toole	$30,785	$38,983	26.6%
MONTANA	$33,281	$44,011	32.2%

Poverty

In 2010, pockets of poverty 20% or greater were charted in non-metro Liberty, Judith Basin, Pondera, and Teton Counties.[7] Poverty rates remain higher on reservations than for neighboring counties. Seven census tracts had poverty rates greater than 30%. These areas were home to a total of 48,747 residents, or 37% of Northcentral Montana's population. That is, 37% of the population lives in a census tract whose poverty rate is greater than 30%.

Like many metropolitan areas, Cascade County demonstrates disparity of wealth and income. In 2011, seven census tracts had poverty rates greater than 20% (averaging 27%); at the same time, four census tracts had poverty rates of only 3% to 5%. In 2011, 13.8% of Great Falls residents had incomes below poverty level (this included 25.9% of children under age 5). The American Community Survey (ACS) estimates that 32.9% of the city's American Indian residents experienced poverty in 2011.[8]

Table 3.2: County and Reservation Poverty Rates

RESERVATION	2005-2009 (ACS)
Blackfeet	31.4%
Fort Belknap	37.7%
Rocky Boy's	36.9%
COUNTY	2006-2010 (ACS)
Blaine	29.0%
Cascade	13.5%
Chouteau	21.0%
Glacier	25.4%
Hill	17.9%
Judith Basin	9.9%
Liberty	19.5%
Phillips	13.5%
Pondera	21.5%
Teton	12.8%
Toole	15.7%
MONTANA	14.8%*

*U.S. Census Bureau Estimate

Employment

Rural communities and reservations offer limited opportunity for employment. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, seven rural counties in Northcentral Montana lost jobs from November 2012 to November 2013. This followed a national trend in which urban counties added the highest number of jobs, micropolitan counties added some jobs, and rural counties lost jobs.

In 2009, a region-wide labor availability survey by the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research assessed quantity and quality of workers in Northcentral Montana. The available labor force was predominantly younger, with those aged 18-44 years accounting for more than two-thirds of the total. Those whose highest educational credential was a high school diploma or GED constituted 62% of the available workforce. More than one in 10 of those who are receptive to new employment opportunities do not have a high school degree. 15.5% of the available workforce, or approximately 4,800 potential workers, had a four-year college degree. There were estimated to be 30,700 adults describing themselves as willing and available for new job opportunities.

Table 3.3: Regional employment by industry

	Region	% of Private Sector Jobs for Region	% of Private Sector Jobs Statewide
Higher than State Average			
Health Care and Social Assist. Services	9,213	20.75%	19.37%
Accommodations – Food Services	6,654	14.99%	13.20%
Construction	2,278	5.13%	3.05%
Arts – Entertainment – Recreation	1,705	3.84%	2.84%
Within 1% of State Average			
Retail Trade	7,312	16.47%	16.68%
Finance – Insurance – Real Estate	2,697	6.08%	5.65%
Wholesale Trade	2,258	5.09%	4.42%
Transportation – Warehouse	1,025	2.31%	3.23%
Information	889	2.00%	2.78%
Lower than State Average			
Services (Admin, Education, Health)	4,486	10.11%	12.07%
Professional-Technical – Management	1,653	3.72%	5.84%
Manufacturing	1,172	2.64%	4.96%
Mining	397	0.89%	1.96%
		% of Total Jobs for Region	
Government (Federal, State, Local)	11,537	20.62%	19.82%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns, 2011 and Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012

Social Trends: Health Care and Healthy Living

Residents of rural communities and reservations who need health services for family members are accustomed to driving long distances to access care. Families without access to health care or assisted living must move elders to distant hub communities. Full-service hospitals are distant and medical emergency response times are longer than in urban areas.[9] In the VF "Community Mapping" exercise (n=405), 50% of respondents indicated they could access emergency medical services in their hometowns. Otherwise, emergency medical services are located in hub communities. Just over half (53%) of respondents indicated that they access routine medical needs near home. However, only 15% access specialist medical services near home. Heaviest travel is to metropolitan centers Great Falls and distant Billings.

In addition to geographic health care challenges, obesity and diabetes rates are high in rural counties. These health problems are amplified on reservations as American Indians and Alaska Natives are more likely to have diabetes compared with non-Hispanic whites.[10] Remote rural communities and reservations demonstrate the highest percentages of elderly residents, have limited access to fresh foods, and offer fewer alternatives to automobile transportation. They may also lack community design features that encourage residents to seek physical exercise such as public recreation amenities, passable sidewalks, street lighting, safe walking routes to schools, recreational trails, and pedestrian-friendly shopping areas.

Housing Trends: Aging Housing Stock

Montana Department of Commerce housing surveys show that almost two-thirds (62%) of residential buildings in Northcentral Montana were built prior to 1960.[11] These structures are expensive to heat, require significant maintenance, and often contain health hazards. Residents see improved housing quality and affordability as key to attracting and retaining new workers and families to rural communities. Demand for adapted senior housing will grow as elders "age in place" rather than leave home communities. Oil and gas extraction in North Dakota and Canada have increased housing demand. Housing affordability is a key issue for low and moderate-income residents throughout the region. Housing blight should be removed to decrease health and safety concerns and make room for improved structures. Community members identified new single-family housing, new multi-family housing, expanded access to homebuyer loans, and adapted elder housing as current and potential avenues for economic development.

With enormous growth in the energy sector to the north and east of the region, more goods are being transported through the region. Energy workers have relocated their families to the Hi-Line in order to commute to distant jobs. Some rural communities are seeing new demand for housing. Residents see these developments as indicators of the next "boom." Residents welcome the new jobs, while hoping to balance the opportunities of development with rural values and traditions, maintaining the quality of life that characterizes safe, closely knit communities and beautiful landscapes.

Infrastructure: Upgrades and Maintenance

Much of the regional infrastructure (dams, bridges, roads, water systems) was installed decades ago and is now in need of maintenance and upgrade. Systems are vulnerable to severe climate conditions ranging from heavy rainfall and flooding to drought, or extreme winter cold to extreme summer heat.

Rural transportation costs are high relative to urban areas; regional transit services assist mobility of elderly, people with disabilities, youth, and non-driver residents.
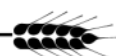
III. Regional Connections

A. Access to Opportunity

In 2012, over 400 Northcentral Montana residents completed surveys that told where they travel for work, shopping, and health care services. While the majority of residents worked close to home, many more traveled long distances to obtain health care services and to shop for household goods.

Business and industry rely on regional transportation to move goods, access the region's robust labor pool, and market goods and services throughout the trade area. Transportation patterns represent the strong connections between communities in the region.

The following examples highlight the interdependent nature of transportation, employment, and commerce that link communities across the region:

- ADF International Inc. (a subsidiary of Canadian-based ADF Group) recently constructed a steel fabrication facility in Great Falls due to its proximity to Canadian markets and the ability to transport goods on the regional highways network.

- Recent construction of multi-million dollar high capacity grain loading elevators in Chester, Carter, and Conrad relied on a regional labor pool for construction workers.

- The University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research recently noted that Great Falls merchants serve a large market area running from Toole County to Valley County across the Hi-Line and counties to the south: "It's not just retail, but health care, professional services, accountants and lawyers."[12]

- Montana-Alberta-Tie Line (MATL) is a transmission line transecting the region that will allow development of wind energy.
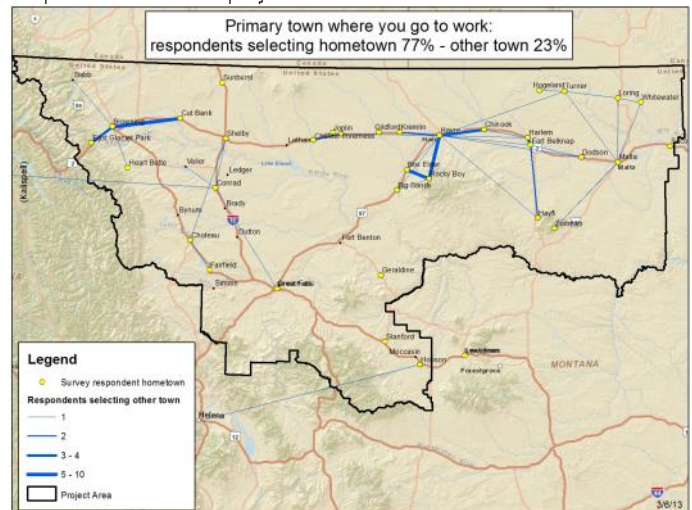
Map 3.2: Travel for household goods
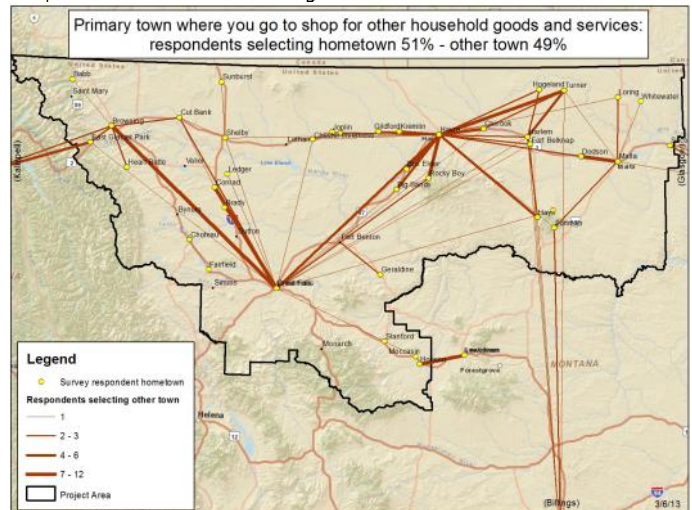
Map 3.3: Travel for medical services
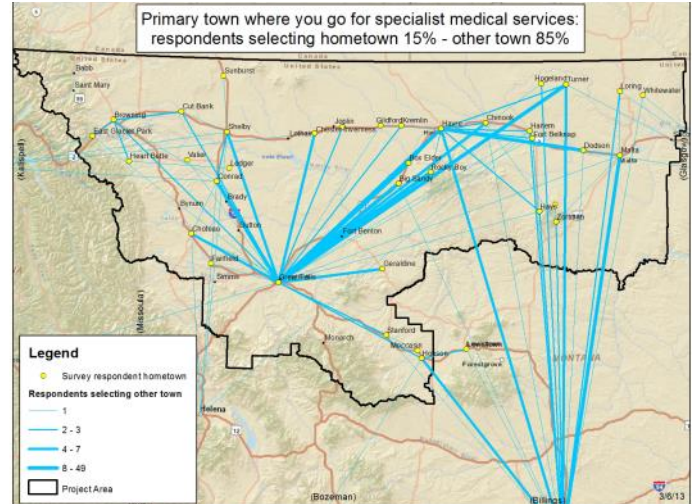
Map 3.4: Travel for employment

Source: Prepared by Opportunity Link, data compiled from Resident Surveys conducted in 2013

B. Interdependent Communities

While every town makes a unique contribution to the regional economy, all of our communities rely on one another for services and consumers; the health of the region as a whole is dependent on the health of all the towns within the region. In order to describe the interdependent relationships of towns in our region, we identified them by the functions they serve.

Hub Community: Hub communities are centers for employment, health care, financial services, major retail, and commercial transportation services. They are often regional headquarters for state agencies and federal programs. Hub towns attract residents and commuters by providing employment and services not available in surrounding areas.

Rural County Seat: The county seat is the center for county government and typically the largest town in the county. It is often home to community-owned branch bank offices and satellite state and federal program offices. Consolidated high schools are often located at county seats.

Rural Town: Incorporated municipalities typically have less than 1,000 people.   Many of these towns are situated along the main highways or transportation corridors, rely on the larger hub towns and county seats for expanded shopping and services and provide agriculture services for farms and ranches. Although these towns have elected local governments and taxing authority, it is not uncommon for them to have intergovernmental agreements or mutual aid agreements with the county and other nearby towns to provide certain municipal services. Residents indicated that essential establishments in these towns include a grocery store, gas station, school, and community meeting place.

Reservation: Similar to the surrounding rural counties, reservations include incorporated towns (Browning, Harlem); census-designated places (Heart Butte, Fort Belknap Agency, Box Elder, Rocky Boy

Agency); and more remote villages. Every reservation has an agency that headquarters tribal offices, tribal schools and community colleges, and commercial services.

Unincorporated Town or Census Designated Place (CDP): These unincorporated settlements are clusters of houses with place names that have no local government charter and therefore do not have any local elected officials or taxing authority. Roads, public safety, and land use issues are under the jurisdiction of the county. These areas may have separate water, sewer, and fire districts that provide some services.

Every town requires its own diverse economic and sustainability strategies. Agricultural towns want to keep basic services such as gas stations and grocery stores and to revitalize their main street business districts. Some want to connect with regional transit service or improve broadband access. Hub towns seek new retailers to draw shoppers and boost downtown districts, as well as expanded recreation opportunities for residents of all ages. All our towns need more and/or improved housing; many want to upgrade infrastructure like water systems, sidewalks, and streetlights.

Meeting places are important.

"It can be a church or a bar—doesn't matter to us as long as we have someplace to meet."

-Resident comment from 2012 Community Roundtables

Pendroy United Methodist Church

IV. Regional Collaboration

A. Working Together

Partnerships across jurisdictions can create cost efficiencies through pooling of resources, enhancing bargaining power, and reducing duplicative services. Multiple partners can generate a broader base of community support for projects. Grant makers are more likely to fund projects that leverage community resources from several partners. Collaborations can also produce improved decision-making capabilities by bringing multiple resources to the resolution of a community need or problem.

At the scenario planning workshops, participants identified existing partnering arrangements within the region. More than 20 unique collaborations were identified (as seen in Figure 3.6). These partnerships are models for the region and provide a foundation for additional collaboration that will multiply the potential benefits of working together.

Figure 3.6: Existing partnerships identified at scenario planning workshops

Toole/Liberty County Weed District

Bear Paw Development

NeighborWorks

North Central Montana Healthy Communities

Russell Country Tourism

Northern Arts Network

Dinosaur Trail

College Coordination

North Montana Disposal District

Police - Fire Mutual Aid

Watershed Groups

Saint Mary's Canal Working Group

Sweetgrass Development

Triangle Communications

North Central Montana Transit and Northern Transit Interlocal

Benefis Telemed Network

North Central Montana Water Project

Human Resources Development Council

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

Top: 36 inch core line pipe waiting to be installed for regional water system– *North Central Montana Water Project Website*

2nd Row (L to R): Einiosaurus greeter at *Old Trail Museum* in Choteau– *Dino Trail Facebook Page*; Construction trades students building Energy Star efficient homes in Great Falls-*NeighborWorks Montana Website*; Employees from *Triangle Communications* splice fiber for broadband installation– Photo Courtesy of Triangle Communications

3rd Row (L to R): Passenger boarding Northern Transit Interlocal– Photo Courtesy of Deb Brandon; Weed prevention sign to educate visitors and reinforce rancher commitments to prevention– *Weed Prevention Area Website*

B. Thinking Strategically

It is clear that future growth requires region-wide innovation. Our strategies for sustainable economic growth must harness our entire suite of strengths and assets, starting with our people. We must use our assets to support Northcentral Montana, rather than any single community, if we are to compete effectively in a national and global marketplace.

A regional plan does not mean that government will lead the charge; instead a regional plan empowers business leaders to look beyond political boundaries when developing their strategies, and to see the region as a whole. Government has a role to play, but economic development will grow better as a collaborative regional process.

The strength of this regional plan comes from the fact that it is wholly driven by resident desires and concerns, and reflects private sector input supported by government responsiveness. Northcentral Montana residents want to achieve levels of economic growth commensurate with its resources and assets. To accomplish that goal, the region is committed to working as a unit to produce new jobs, sustainable economic growth, and vibrant communities.

"At planning meetings held throughout the District, residents expressed a desire to initiate projects that will provoke sustainable, multi-faceted economic development. Most often mentioned was the desire to develop value-added agricultural products, attract more tourists, foster the development of homegrown businesses, and to turn our abundant supplies of agricultural products, wind, sunlight and natural gas into alternate sources of affordable, reliable energy. The residents of our District have also accepted the challenge of understanding and addressing the causes of poverty, and they have shown a willingness to face the challenges of communicating and collaborating with other communities and cultures to create and sustain positive change."

-Bear Paw Development, CEDS 2012

Sources

1. *National Rural Health Association, Policy Position: Definition of Frontier, 2008*

2. *U.S. Census Bureau, Census* 2010, PL 94-171, 2011

3. Grant, M. J. (2011) *Dryland Farming in Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, D.J. Wishart, ed., University of Nebraska—Lincoln

4. U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis *State Personal Income*

5. U.S. Census Bureau (2014) *State and County QuickFacts*

6. USCB 1990 and 2000 Census; 2005-2009, *American Community Survey*

7. 2007-2011 American Community Survey *5-year estimates*

8. Ibid

9. S.R. Myers, et al. Annals of Emergency Medicine Safety in Numbers: *Are Major Cities the Safest Places in the United States?* 2013

10. *Diabetes in American Indians and Alaska Natives*, Facts At-a-Glance, June 2012 Indian Health Services Medical Programs

11. Montana Department of Commerce Montana Housing Condition Study, 2005

12. Johnson, Charles. *"Things are looking up in 2014 for Great Falls Economy,"* Billings Gazette, December 22, 2013

Chapter IV: Systems Approach

I. Overview

A "systems thinking" approach looks at individual components as part of a larger system and considers how the components relate to one another. Recognizing the relationship between community systems helps identify goals and objectives that are complementary. This approach can lead planners and community leaders to more effective strategies.

Understanding how various systems work and how they are interdependent also provides a framework for building connections between a variety of agencies and institutions. This recognition of mutual goals and objectives paves the way for powerful new partnerships.

Every individual component of a system must be functional in order for the system to thrive as a whole. For example, if housing is unaffordable and of poor quality, neighborhoods cannot be healthy; without healthy neighborhoods, economic development cannot proceed. Therefore, housing affects neighborhoods directly and economic development indirectly.

When communities work together, they have access to a wider range of financial, human, and capital resources. A region's collective assets allow it to respond to change and provide a solid foundation for future growth. When communities of all sizes throughout a region are economically vibrant, the entire larger system—the region—is healthy as well. Conversely, the region cannot thrive if individual communities are in distress.

II. Benefits of a Systems Approach

Communities that adopt a "systems approach" are more likely to recognize the shifting economic or social landscape that will demand the attention of public officials. Governments that can identify important demographic, market, and technology trends will be better prepared to react to these changes at the local level. In order to adjust to new demands for service from a growing or aging population, to adapt to new regulatory requirements, or to respond to unpredictable events, such as weather cycles or an economic downturn, communities must be learning organizations with the capacity to assess and manage changing circumstances. A systems approach provides the framework to help communities adapt to change.

This approach also helps communities recognize the linkages between various systems and subsequently broadens the possibilities for collaboration and crafting solutions that can solve multiple problems. Cost efficiencies are gained through such collaborations by sharing resources and strategically targeting investment to achieve multiple objectives.

The regional plan emphasizes the benefits of the systems approach in order to build on the successes of existing collaborations and increase awareness of the potential benefits of these connections. Important principles underlying the systems approach include:

- Community and regional systems are complex and are comprised of multiple overlapping systems.

- Community systems are dynamic and continually change to reflect shifting trends. There is a need to routinely assess and evaluate the effectiveness of various systems.

- Changes in one part of the community system can cause significant changes in other parts of the system.

- It is important to foster communication among all levels and departments in the organization or region to identify potential threats and opportunities within the system and respond accordingly.

- Communities that have strong connections between systems and collaborate on solutions are more likely to realize the benefits of a systems approach.

- Identifying shared community values and incorporating those values in planning and operation of the system components facilitates better communication and collaboration.

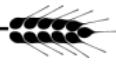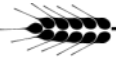# III. Planning Systems

A. Regional Systems

Northcentral Montana residents want a strong economy that offers opportunities for employment, supports a diverse range of industries, and builds on regional assets while maintaining a high quality of life. Local leaders recognize that economic development relies on a support system comprised of adequate housing stock to provide lodging for workers, adequate infrastructure to support industry, and amenities to attract employers, workers, and visitors. Quality education for children is one of the most crucial factors that households consider when making locational decisions. Clean air and water, lack of traffic congestion, and ample outdoor recreation are system components that our communities can market to potential businesses and industries that will stimulate economic growth.

Local growth policies, regional comprehensive economic development strategies (CEDS), and resident input all recognize the relationship between individual components within community and regional economic systems. The following case studies show that there are many examples within the region where public agencies are employing the systems approach.

"We envision economically healthy, thriving communities that provide family wage jobs through a blend of diversified agricultural economies (with emphasis on value-added enterprises), a public transportation system to link communities, improved infrastructure, expanded retail opportunities, improved marketing, promotion and coordination of regional tourism, as well as attracting outside investment for projects and activities with regional impact." - *Sweetgrass Development, Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2012 – 2017*

Click for more information about Sweetgrass Development
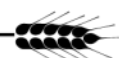
SYSTEMS CASE STUDY: **Industry Cluster –
Renewable Energy**

Description:
Renewable energy was one of the most popular strategies mentioned in Vibrant Futures' public meetings. Studies support the potential for renewable technologies in the region. For example, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) conducted a study to estimate the technical potential of specific renewable electricity generation technologies for every state, based on natural features, climate, landmass, and other necessary technical factors. The types of renewable energy with the most potential in Montana were solar, wind, and hydropower. Northcentral Montana is well situated for development in each of these technologies. Biofuels are another type of renewable energy that have potential for growth in the region.

System Components: Economic development, infrastructure, quality of life, value-added agriculture

Partnerships/Connections: Local and state government, utilities, business and industry, homeowners, land owners, conservationists

Source: Montana DEQ Renewable Energy

SYSTEMS CASE STUDY: **Workforce Training and Economic Development**

Description:
The Great Falls College Montana State University was the lead applicant for a $25M grant that will be shared by 13 colleges in Montana, including several colleges in Northcentral Montana. The U.S. Department of Labor awarded the grant for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program for development and expansion of innovative workforce training programs that promote skills development and employment opportunities in advanced manufacturing, transportation, and health care as well as other science, technology, engineering, and math careers. The TAA program will create partnerships between educators and local employers. The colleges, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, and 57 industry partners are collaborating to design curriculum and implement new certificates and workforce training approaches.

System Components: Economic development, education, labor force, health care

Partnerships/Connections: community colleges, Tribal colleges, Montana Dept. of Labor and Industry, private industry and business, economic development agencies

Source: Trade Adjustment Assistance State Profile: Montana
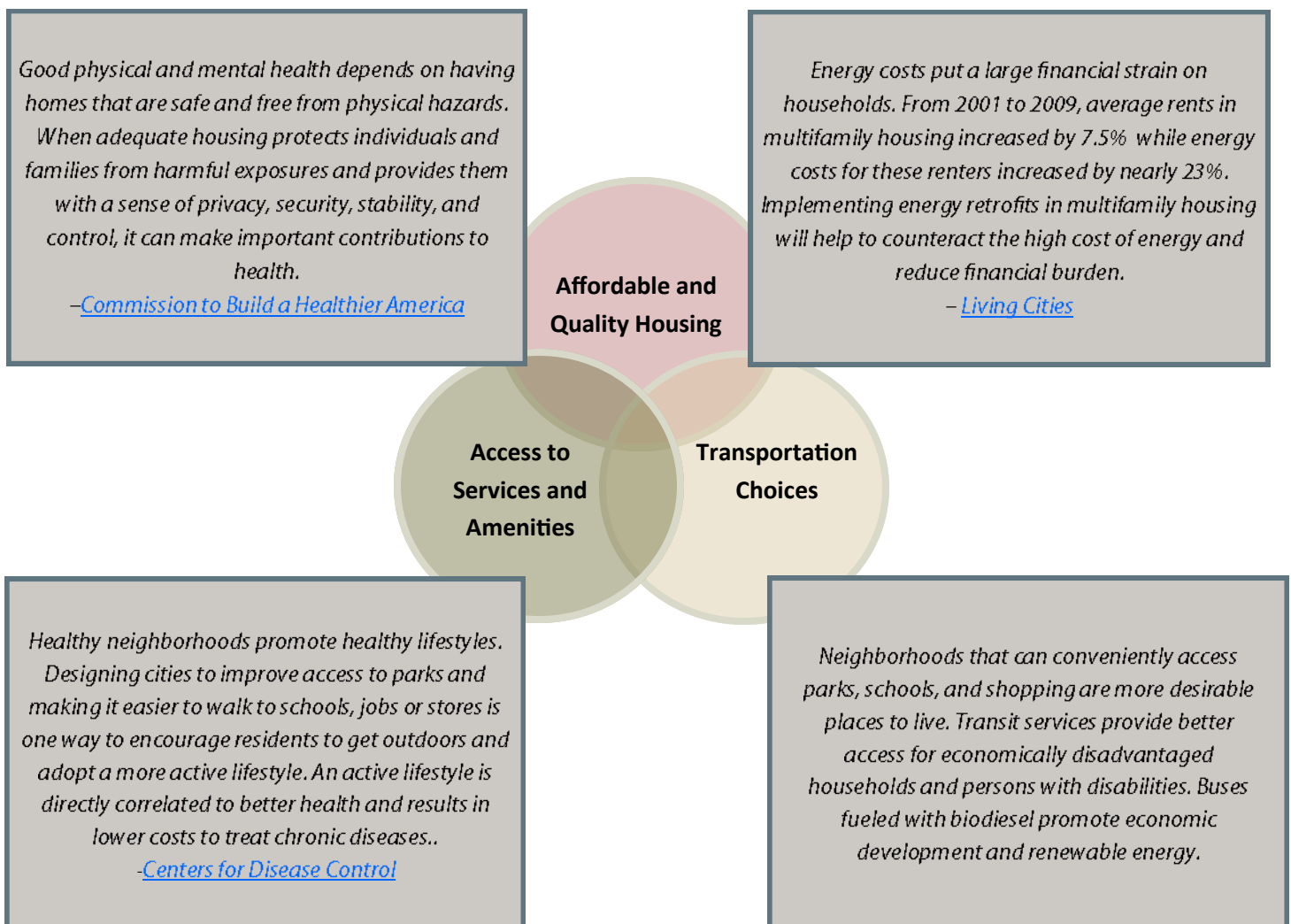
B. Neighborhood System

Components of a healthy neighborhood include:

- Quality affordable housing;
- Convenient access to shopping, parks, and schools;
- Resident safety from crime, traffic dangers, and health hazards;
- And well-maintained infrastructure.

A vibrant community includes neighborhoods that offer a full range of housing that meets the needs of different families and age groups and is affordable to all ranges of household incomes. In the past, affordable housing was measured only by the cost of households' mortgage or rent. This resulted in housing developments built on less costly land on the outskirts of towns and away from jobs, parks, fresh foods, and other services. Although housing costs were lower, transportation costs increased because of longer driving distances. When we consider transportation costs and land use patterns as part of the housing system, the economic value of locating housing near services and employment centers, or providing transit to reduce transportation costs, is evident. Energy costs are another factor contributing to housing costs. Older homes may need energy conservation upgrades to be truly affordable.

Figure 4.1: Components of a healthy neighborhood system

Good physical and mental health depends on having homes that are safe and free from physical hazards. When adequate housing protects individuals and families from harmful exposures and provides them with a sense of privacy, security, stability, and control, it can make important contributions to health.
–Commission to Build a Healthier America

Energy costs put a large financial strain on households. From 2001 to 2009, average rents in multifamily housing increased by 7.5% while energy costs for these renters increased by nearly 23%. Implementing energy retrofits in multifamily housing will help to counteract the high cost of energy and reduce financial burden.
– Living Cities

Affordable and Quality Housing

Access to Services and Amenities

Transportation Choices

Healthy neighborhoods promote healthy lifestyles. Designing cities to improve access to parks and making it easier to walk to schools, jobs or stores is one way to encourage residents to get outdoors and adopt a more active lifestyle. An active lifestyle is directly correlated to better health and results in lower costs to treat chronic diseases..
-Centers for Disease Control

Neighborhoods that can conveniently access parks, schools, and shopping are more desirable places to live. Transit services provide better access for economically disadvantaged households and persons with disabilities. Buses fueled with biodiesel promote economic development and renewable energy.

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2013

CASE STUDY: Fair Housing Equity Assessment

Description:

Vibrant Futures worked with the Rural Communities Assistance Corporation to complete an assessment of housing availability and access in Northcentral Montana. Among the findings from the assessment:

- Homeowner vacancy rates in Northcentral Montana communities are low; most range from 0 to 3% (USCB, 2010). Rental vacancies are also low and rural communities have few apartments. Residents report new demand for housing from Bakken workers; they fear that, like North Dakota, housing costs will increase with demand, making housing less affordable for local families.

- Over 85% of the region's single-family residences were built before 1970. Housing in rural counties includes a significant number of mobile homes (from 15% to 25%). Much housing is in substandard condition. Residents recommend rehab, retrofitting, removal, or replacement of existing units in substandard condition.

- Poor quality housing and limited availability of housing make it difficult for communities to attract new residents even though many people are drawn to the region's safe and livable communities.

- In remote rural and tribal communities, housing costs are inflated by home heating and transportation. Services like LIEAP and the regional bus systems make life more affordable.

- Some barriers to housing development include difficulty in bonding projects, land use zoning restrictions, and infrastructure gaps. Nevertheless, residents and advocates see regional housing development and improvement as a potential economic engine for jobs, services, and sale of goods.

To address these issues, Northcentral Montana relies on federal HUD, USDA, and BIA funding to support fair housing access. Programs include Low Income Housing Tax Credit development incentives; homebuyer education and loan programs; and subsidized rentals for low-income, elderly, and people with disabilities. Like other federal funding to rural areas, housing funds have shrunk. Housing advocates urge Montana's state government to expand program funding. Working as a region could help housing providers leverage more resources to meet residents' housing needs.

System Components: Energy – utilities, land use, community infrastructure, workforce housing,, transportation, single- and multi-family housing supply

Partnerships/Connections: Homeowners and renters, municipal and county governments (growth plansland-use zoning, infrastructure development), state government, Montana Board of Housing, Montana Department of Commerce, Federal government, USDA, HUD, housing developers, Regional housing advocates/Housing Authorities (City of Great Falls, Blackfeet Tribe, Chippewa Cree Tribe, Fort Belknap Tribe), District IV HRDC, Action for Eastern Montana, Neighborworks Great Falls, Neighborworks Montana, HomeWord

Source: Northcentral Montana Fair Housing Equity Assessment, 2014.

CASE STUDY: Transportation Planning

Description:

Opportunity Link (OL) facilitated the development of a regional transportation plan in 2006 with the help of LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc. The plan specifically focuses on transit service issues and examines transit needs, alternatives, goals, and programs that could be used to develop regional transportation service in the area. Meetings were open to the public to provide input on transportation issues, to evaluate existing transit services, and to identify future transit service options and alternatives. This regional transportation plan gave options for both community implementation and coordinated implementation.

In 2008, Opportunity Link requested the assistance of the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University-Bozeman to get a regional coordinated transportation system off the ground. They established partnerships between city, county, and tribal governments; developed fixed-bus routes; and secured funding to support system costs. The following transit services were established:

- Northern Transit Interlocal (March 2008) – Cities of Shelby, Conrad, Cut Bank, Counties of Toole, Pondera and Glacier, Northwest Healthcare of Kalispell, Opportunity Link
- Fort Belknap Transit Service (March 2009) – Fort Belknap Indian Community Council, Opportunity Link
- North Central Montana Transit (August 2009) – Cities of Havre, Chinook, Harlem, Counties of Hill and Blaine, Fort Belknap Indian Community Council, Chippewa Cree Tribe, Montana State University-Northern, Opportunity Link, and local community organizations
- Rocky Boy Transit System (September 2009) – Chippewa Cree Tribe
- Toole County Transit (March 2010) – Toole County, Northern Transit Interlocal
- Glacier County Transit (March 2011) – Glacier County, Northern Transit Interlocal

In 2010, Opportunity Link was awarded transportation planning facilitation and technical assistance from Easter Seals Project ACTION's 2010 Mobility Planning Services: Accessible Transportation Coalitions Initiative. The North-central Montana Accessible Transportation Coalition (ATC) included 9 transit systems, 7 social service agencies, and 3 state agencies. Planning was led by OL with technical assistance from Easter Seals Project ACTION. The ATC highlighted connectivity as critical to the health and self-sufficiency of economically disadvantaged populations, non-drivers, senior citizens, and persons with disabilities in remote rural communities.

Northcentral Montana's ATC priorities were integrated into statewide transportation planning by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services and Montana Department of Transportation in 2011 and 2012. Priorities include alignment of state agency investments and transportation funding for delivery of rural transit services, regional efforts to deliver services to areas not now served, service to marginalized populations, and coordination of new and existing transit systems. For these efforts, Opportunity Link was the recipient of awards for transportation excellence from the Federal Highways Administration and the Federal Transit Administration.

System Components:
- Transportation
- Employment
- Health care and aging services

Partnerships/Connections: Local government, tribal governments, Montana Department of Transportation, non-profit agencies, Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services

Source: Regional Transportation Plan Final Report

C. Weather Systems

Weather systems impact both urban and agricultural systems. Typical weather patterns in the region can be described as semi-arid with cold, dry winters and warm, light-precipitation summers. During winter months, arctic cold temperatures from the north can result in sub-zero readings. In summer, the region can experience extreme heat with temperatures reaching 100 degrees. The growing season, defined as the number of days with lows exceeding 32 degrees, averages around 130 days and typically lasts between May 15 and September 20. Among the challenges of extreme weather are flooding, drought, increased risk of wildfires, higher heating and cooling costs, and higher maintenance costs for roads due to freeze/frost/thaw cycles.

In 2005, the Governor directed the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to establish a Climate Change Advisory Committee (CCAC). The CCAC was charged with evaluating state-level greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and identifying reduction opportunities. The Committee agreed on 54 recommendations focused on energy conservation, promoting renewable energy sources, fuel efficiency in vehicles, open space preservation, and efficient use of resources. Recommendations related to land use include infill development, mixed-use development, and transit to reduce the total amount of vehicle miles traveled.[1] Locally, communities have undertaken a number of initiatives to respond to weather events. These include: Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Plans, Floodplain Management, Montana Water Supply and Drought Advisory Committee.[2]

CASE STUDY: Federal Emergency Management System - Community Rating System

Description:
The Community Rating System (CRS) is a voluntary program for National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) participating communities. The goals of the CRS are to reduce flood damages to insurable property, strengthen and support the insurance aspects of the NFIP, and encourage a comprehensive approach to floodplain management.

The CRS has been developed to provide incentives (insurance premium discounts) for communities that develop extra measures to provide protection from flooding. Premium discounts ranging from 5% to 45% are applied to eligible policies as recognition of the instituted floodplain management activities. There are 18 activities recognized as measures for eliminating exposure to floods. Credit points are assigned to each activity. The activities are organized under four main categories: public information, mapping and regulation, flood damage reduction, and flood preparedness.

All CRS communities must maintain completed FEMA elevation and flood-proofing certificates for all new and substantially improved construction that requires flood insurance. Many CRS communities receive credit for providing insurers with information from the community's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM). In Northcentral Montana, only Cascade County, Great Falls, and Belt are using the CRS program to reduce flood insurance costs.

System Components: Stormwater systems, Housing, Infrastructure, Public safety, Health

Partnerships/Connections: Local communities and tribal government, disaster and emergency services coordinators, federal emergency management agencies, finance and insurance companies, watershed groups, state government– Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

Source: National Flood Insurance Program Community Rating System
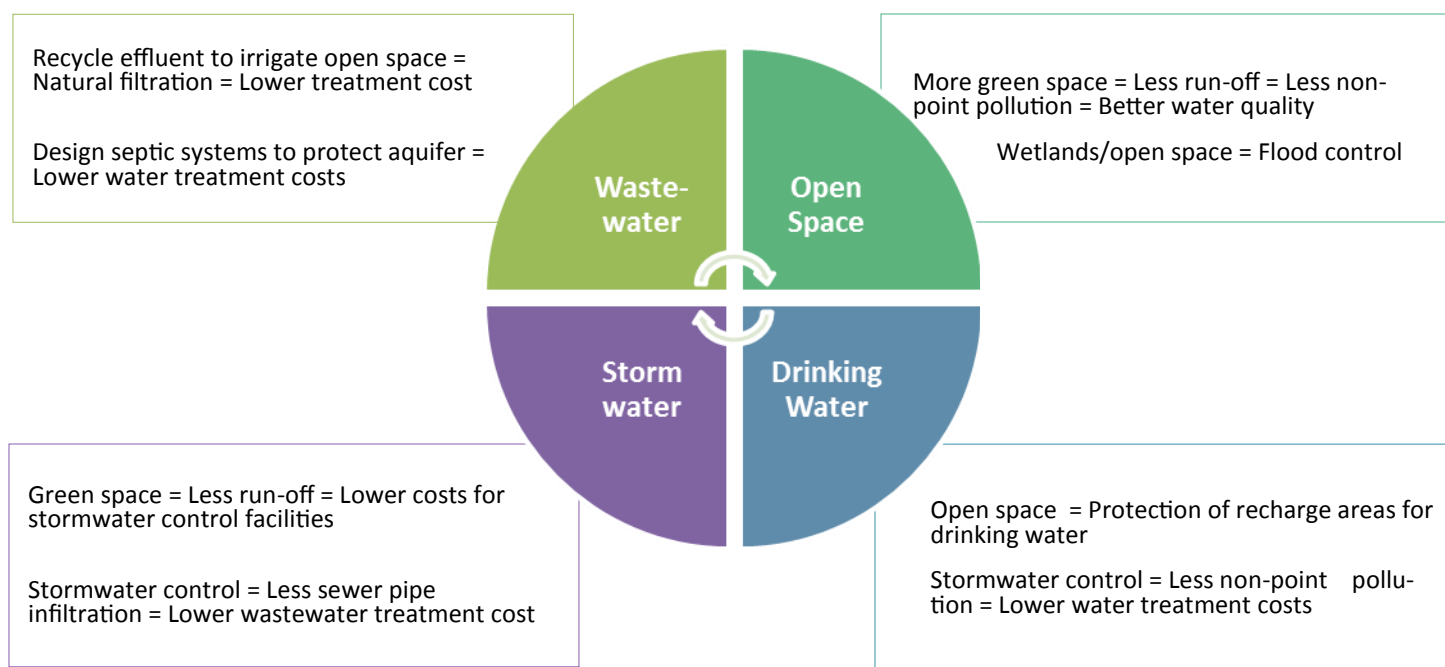
D. Integrated Water Management System

An integrated water management approach represents a fundamental change in how drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater facilities are planned, constructed, and operated. This approach considers how to improve water quality and achieve cost efficiencies by planning these utilities as one system. An integrated approach also considers how these utilities relate to other urban components such as parks, green spaces, roads, and commercial parking lots. The numerous benefits of managing these utilities in an integrated fashion include lower water treatment costs, flood control, better water quality, and improved fisheries.

Some strategies for integrated water management are promotion of low impact development; recycling and reuse of wastewater effluent; coordination of investments in water, transportation, and housing infrastructure; water conservation programs; and minimizing environmental impacts by mimicking natural systems.

Another approach considers the impact of local systems on water quality throughout the watershed area. A watershed is the land area that drains into the water body and generally crosses multiple jurisdictional boundaries. Watershed planning requires a collaborative effort among multiple stakeholders such as landowners, agricultural producers, local governments, recreationists, and businesses. Watershed plan strategies address point and non-point pollution through forest and rangeland management; support agricultural best practices; reduce impervious areas; and promote open space, green space, and wetlands that filter potential pollutants. These strategies have the added benefits of protecting habitat, providing flood control, creating recreational amenities, and protecting source water for drinking systems.

Figure 4.2: Integrated Water Management System

Recycle effluent to irrigate open space = Natural filtration = Lower treatment cost

Design septic systems to protect aquifer = Lower water treatment costs

More green space = Less run-off = Less non-point pollution = Better water quality

Wetlands/open space = Flood control

Green space = Less run-off = Lower costs for stormwater control facilities

Stormwater control = Less sewer pipe infiltration = Lower wastewater treatment cost

Open space = Protection of recharge areas for drinking water

Stormwater control = Less non-point pollution = Lower water treatment costs

Prepared by Applied Communications, 2013

CASE STUDY: North Central Montana Regional Water System

Description:
In 1997, the Montana Legislature ratified a water compact between the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation and the State, allocating water to the Tribe from Lake Elwell. Following approval of the compact, the Tribe, along with 22 participating water systems in Northcentral Montana, undertook a project to bring high quality, cost-effective drinking water to the region.

The core system includes an intake structure, treatment plant, and water distribution system to provide water from Lake Elwell to the residents of the Rocky Boy's Reservation. The non-core system of pipelines and other facilities provides water to the participating users. The system will serve approximately 10,000 households with an estimated population of 28,000.

In addition to addressing the need for drinking water that complies with the Safe Water Drinking Act, the system allows for a more efficient and manageable response to future regulatory changes. The regional water system will provide a reliable source of water that supports economic growth.

System Components: Infrastructure, Economic development, Housing, Health

Partnerships/Connections: Tribal government, state government, local communities, rural water districts, Hutterite colonies, federal funding partners

Source: Rocky Boy's water project

Intake facility at Tiber Dam

CASE STUDY: Source Water Assessments

Description:

Source water is untreated water from streams, rivers, lakes, or aquifers used to supply public drinking water. The Montana Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) requires the participation of all public water systems to identify and protect their water sources.

Unprotected drinking water supplies are vulnerable to contamination and can cause significant health problems. In the past, water suppliers focused on treatment options to meet drinking water standards. The cost of preventing contamination, however, is very small compared to the cost of contamination clean up or installation of treatment systems in response to unsafe drinking water.

Most public systems in the region have completed a community based Source Water Protection Plan. The plans delineate the source water protection area and recommend management strategies to protect water resources. Strategies may include limiting pesticide use, restricting hazardous waste storage, clean-up activities, conservation easements, fixing sewer line leaks, and education. Such strategies can be incorporated into growth policies.

System Components: Water and wastewater infrastructure, Stormwater control, Open space, Healthy communities, Economic development

Partnerships/Connections: Local government and rural water districts, state government, watershed and conservation groups, public health agencies, economic development agencies, education

Source: Source Water Protection Program

Community clean-up days along streams and rivers are examples of non-regulatory actions that can promote water quality.

Planting trees for stream bank restoration projects reduces sedimentation and improves water quality.

Sources

1. Montana Department of Environmental Equality
2. Montana Water Supply and Drought Advisory Committee

Chapter V: Charting the Future

Chapter V: Charting the Future

- ♦ Scenario Planning
- ♦ The Process
- ♦ Scenario Descriptions
- ♦ Scenario Indicators

I. Scenario Planning

Scenarios are narratives that describe a set of assumptions about key issue areas and compare the impacts of different policies and development patterns. Through scenario planning, we can better understand how demographic, economic, social, or regulatory trends might influence different components of a community system such as future land use patterns, transportation networks, local job markets, and service demands. Scenarios offer a framework to envision change.

Through this visioning, we can develop different strategies and investment options to help respond to change. Although scenarios are often used by areas that are experiencing rapid population growth, they can also be useful in understanding economic or demographic changes in areas with small or declining populations. Scenarios develop descriptions about what could happen in the future. Key community indicators are identified in order to compare the differences in alternative scenario descriptions. Stakeholders then use qualitative analysis and visualization tools to see these indicators change and to focus on issues and forces shaping communities.

The purpose of scenario planning is to aid learning and foster a dialogue about how different trends require specific policy responses. Scenario planning is not a one-time exercise; it has the most benefit when used routinely to test assumptions and refine information to reflect current trends. In a 2012 publication called "Opening Access to Scenario Planning

Why Scenario Planning?

- Scenario Planning involves the public and fosters dialogue among community members about their vision for the future;
- Understands the relationships between different regional system components;
- Compares and contrasts how different policy options will impact housing demand, job growth, local government budgets and other indicators;
- Develops proactive local solutions to respond to potential opportunities and threats;
- Anticipates factors that may stress community systems and identifies local resources and regional partnerships that will build capacity to manage these situations;
- And, cultivates local strategies to prepare a community and the region for economic and social changes.
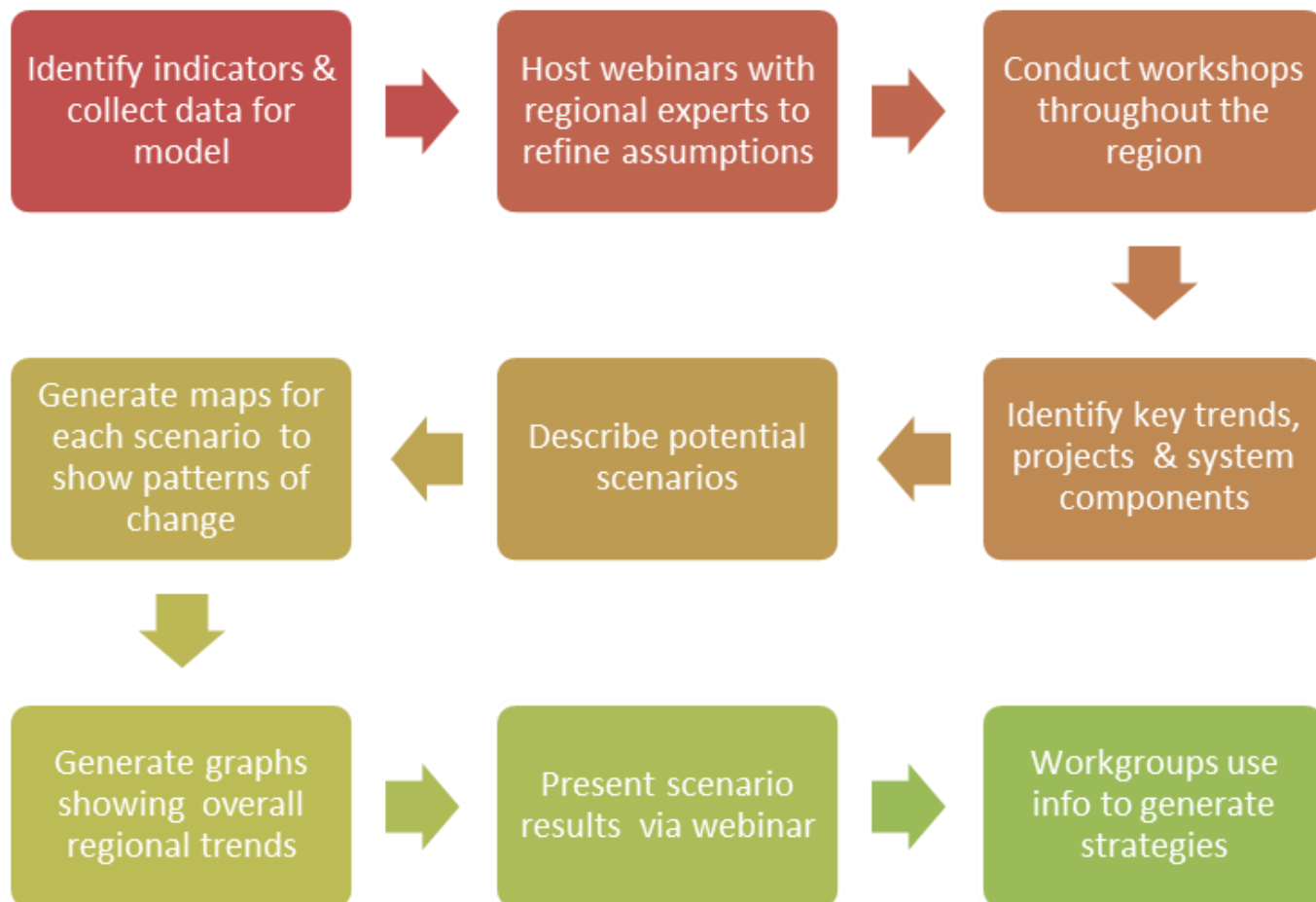
Tools," the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy described the distinction between the use of scenarios in current planning practice and a more fully adopted use of scenario planning by saying, *"In current practice we pretend we can choose with certainty and control a future and work toward it (the preferred scenario). In fully adopting scenario planning ideas, we acknowledge that the future cannot be selected with certainty. We keep multiple scenarios in the mix so that we can plan and act in the face of multiple futures."*

II. The Process

The first step in the scenario planning process is to identify key indicators to be studied and key assumptions that will be used to build the model. The indicators and assumptions should reflect both local trends and national trends that may impact the region. Scenarios that were developed for this plan primarily relied on input from Community Roundtable meetings and Growth Policies to identify local trends. We supplemented this information with interviews from experts and various research reports to identify key state and national trends. Data to document these trends were compiled and resulted in over 300 map layers and indicators.

To describe the potential scenarios, we relied on input from the six Scenario Workshops that were held in the region. Community members, elected officials, local government staff, economic development officials, educators, and other stakeholders participated in hands-on activities to describe important relationships between towns, key collaborations, and alternative future scenarios. Information from all of the workshops was compiled and common assumptions were identified. Using CommunityViz software, maps and charts of various indicators were generated to illustrate how different assumptions in the model would impact factors such as population growth, housing demand, and labor force needs.

Figure 5.1: Vibrant Futures Scenario Planning Process

Identify indicators & collect data for model → Host webinars with regional experts to refine assumptions → Conduct workshops throughout the region ↓ Identify key trends, projects & system components ← Describe potential scenarios ← Generate maps for each scenario to show patterns of change ↓ Generate graphs showing overall regional trends → Present scenario results via webinar → Workgroups use info to generate strategies

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

III. Scenario Descriptions

Responses from the workshops were compiled and grouped into three different scenarios that are described below.

A. Continuing Trends Scenario

In the Continuing Trends Scenario, demographic and economic changes that occurred over the past 20 years were projected to continue into the next 20 years. This was reflected as continued gradual loss of population in rural communities, with population loss greatest along U.S. Highway 2. Small town median age continued to rise due to aging of residents, low birth rates, and young adults leaving to seek employ-

ment. Pockets of increased employment and population were found near hub communities, driven primarily by energy support services for oil and gas extraction in Canada and North Dakota and commercial railroad and trucking transportation along the U.S. Highway 2 transportation corridor. Reservation communities continued to gain population. Map 5.1 shows the patterns of population change over the last 20 years. Areas in red indicate a population loss and areas in blue indicate a population gain.

Map 5.1: Continuing Trends Scenario– Patterns of Population (squares in the map represent a township at 36 square miles)
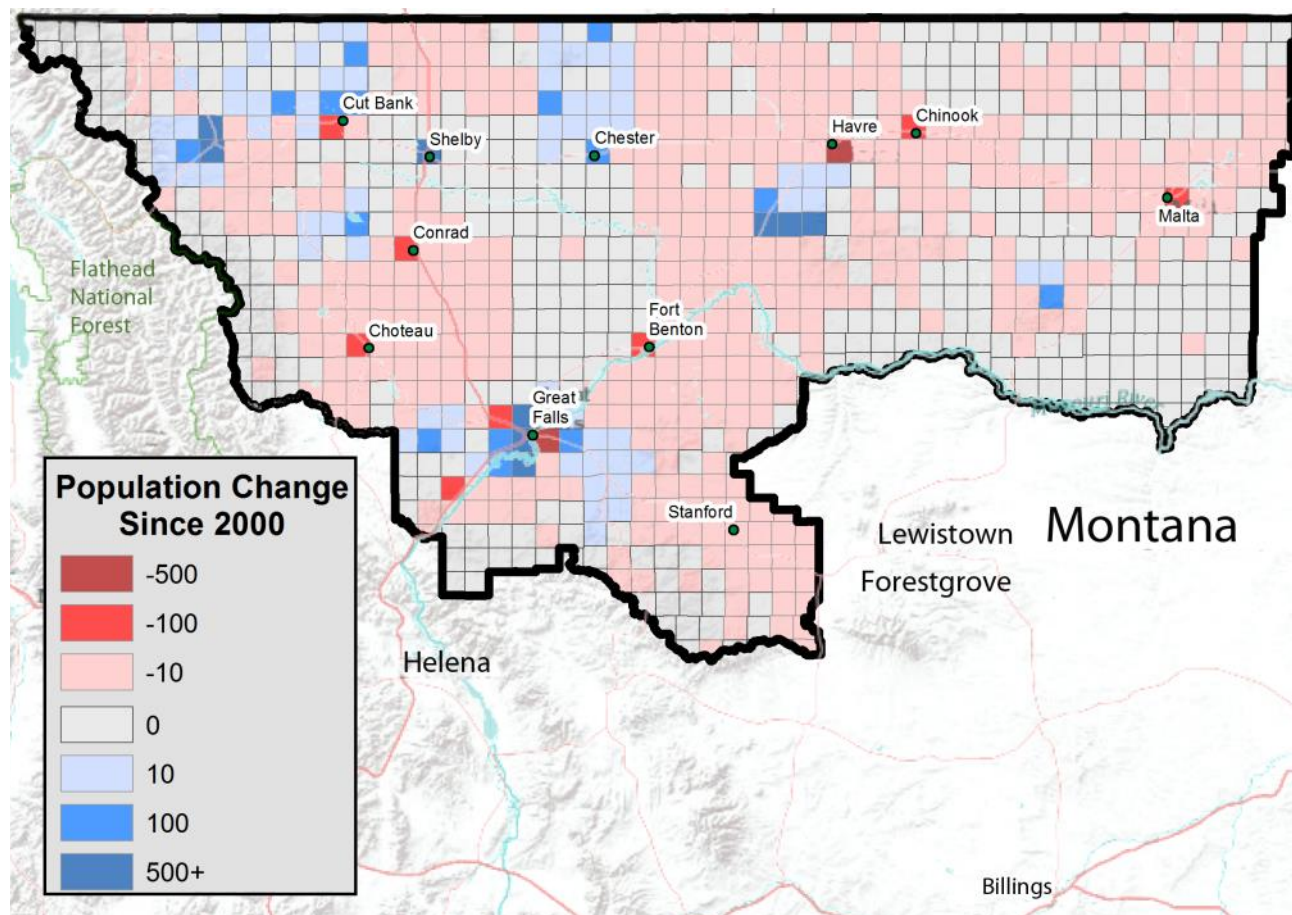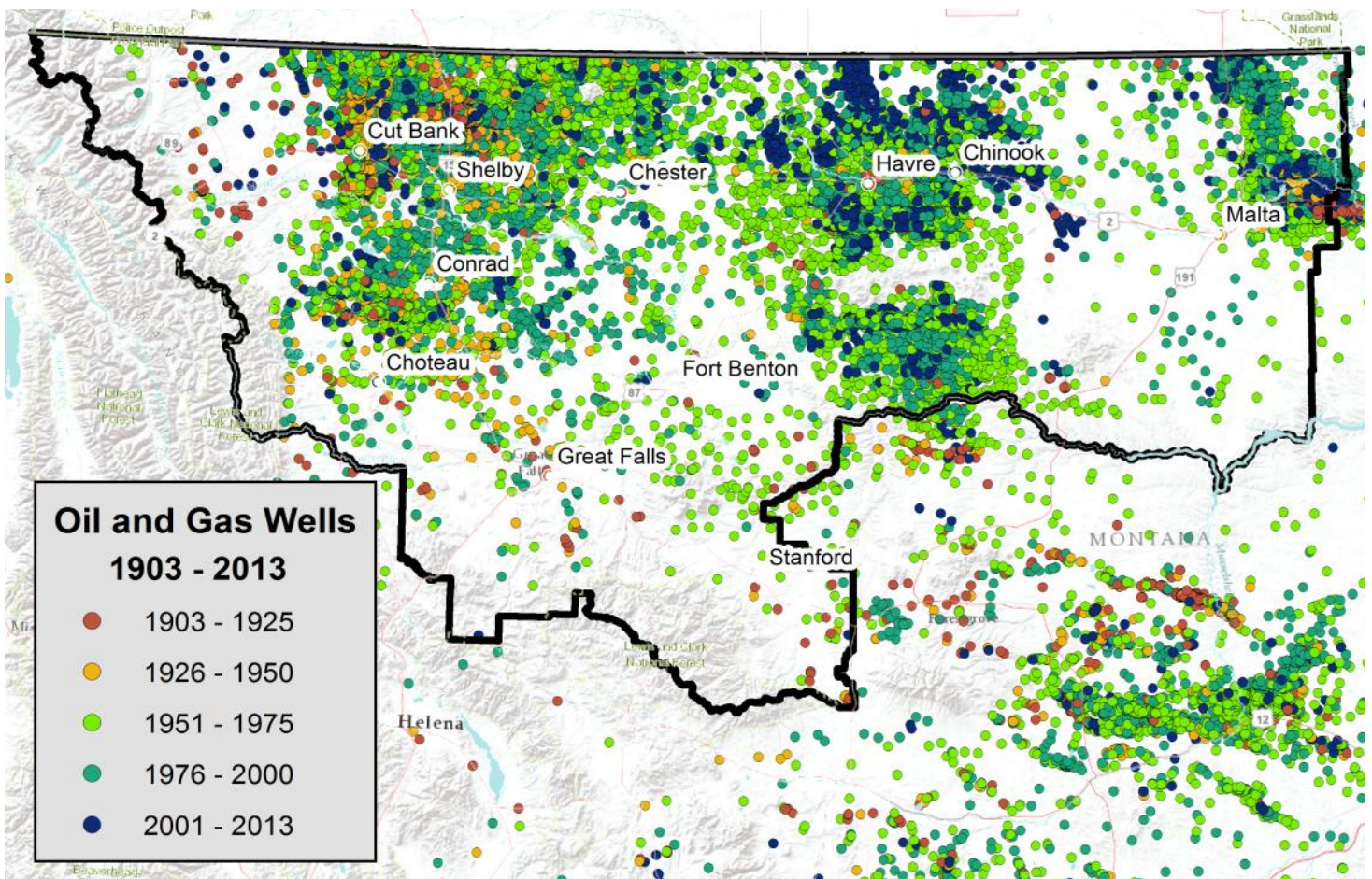

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

B. Boom-Bust Scenario

The Boom-Bust Scenario was spurred by a prevalence of oil extraction in two areas: 1) Cut Bank field, historic site of high-density well drilling; 2) Tiger Ridge field between Rocky Boy's Reservation and Havre. Also in this scenario, we assumed that natural gas prices rise and natural gas drilling booms in the Bowdoin and Whitewater fields, northeast of Malta. In this scenario, a boom produces at least five years of steady growth before oil flows in large volumes; during this time period, wells are installed. In order to meet the needs of the industry, local governments upgraded or expanded supporting infrastructure and services such as roads, water/sewage/sanitation systems, and public safety systems. After 10 years of peak production, oil and gas employment declined when fields are reduced or abandoned. Additional regional economic expansion co-occurred with expanded oil and gas production as regional industries expanded to support extraction in Bakken and Canadian oil sands, and transportation-related industry expanded along major railroad and highway corridors, east-to-west along U.S. Highway 2 and north-to-south along I-15. This scenario also assumed expansion of employment at Malmstrom Air Force Base. Map 5.2 shows the pattern of oil and gas drilling over the last century and indicates where future activity is likely to occur.

*Map 5.2: Historic Oil and Gas Wells from 1900 to 2013*

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

C. Steady Growth Scenario

The Steady Growth Scenario is defined by a steady regional growth pattern over the next 20 years that incorporated development ideas recommended by residents of Northcentral Montana. Projects identified as ongoing and planned during the scenario workshops have been completed and implemented in this scenario. Infrastructure has been upgraded to support economic growth. Some key projects included the update of aging water and sewer infrastructure, completion of the North Central Montana Regional Water System, a transportation hub in Shelby, and enhanced broadband access throughout the region. Other projects that supported economic growth and attracted young professionals back to the region included downtown revitalization efforts and recreational amenities. In this scenario, jobs were created in the renewable energy industry cluster with projects such as the wind farms in Toole County, two medium-scale biofuel refineries in operation within the region (ethanol plant in Great Falls and expanded Earl-Fisher BioFuels in Chester), and energy retrofits in older homes. The value-added agriculture industry cluster represented another growth sector with projects such as a meat processing facility and an increase in specialty crops. This scenario incorporated resident ideas for building on current resources, embracing new technology, and retaining local control of growth. The map below depicts the jobs that are being created as a result of the projects that were identified in the scenario workshops. This allowed for the projection of other predictions about population size, housing, schools, and roads.

Map 5.3: Location and Quantity of Jobs Created as a Result of Projects Identified in the Workshops
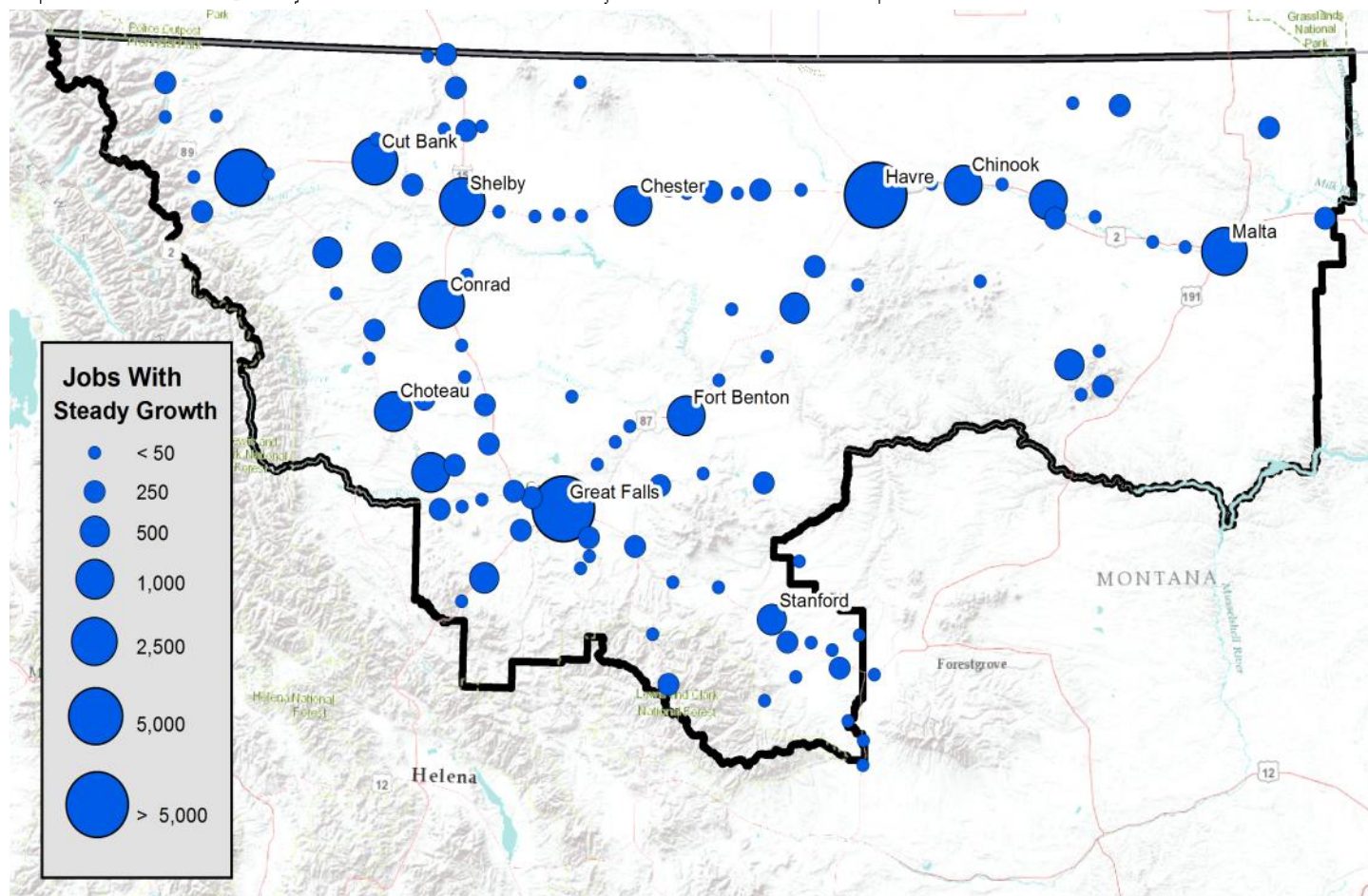
Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014
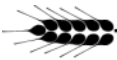
IV. Scenario Indicators

Indicators highlight the key aspects of scenario outcomes. They also provide an understanding of impacts as they relate to the values, goals, and aspirations established by stakeholders. The indicators that are described in this section help us to compare and contrast the different outcomes that result from each scenario.

Continuing Trends

Boom-Bust

Steady Growth

A. Population and Demographic Indicators

Population and demographic indicators describe growth trends in the region under the different scenarios and also show the impacts on the senior population and changes in the younger age cohorts.

Continuing Trends	Boom Bust	Steady Growth
Population is uneven in the region with slow decline in population for rural counties – particularly along the Hi-Line – and with some growth in the hub communities and on the reservations. The population is aging with an increase in the number of seniors. There are fewer young families due to an out-migration of young adults to find jobs and a lower birth rate.	Rapid rate of population growth in areas where there is oil and gas exploration. The senior population decreases in areas where they are priced out of homes and must move. There is an increase in young adults and families from in-migration to the area to fill jobs.	Stable population growth throughout the region. The senior population increases but this is balanced with an increase in young adults and young families that are returning to the area to take advantage of new job opportunities.

*Figure 5.2: Scenario Population Projections for Year 2035*
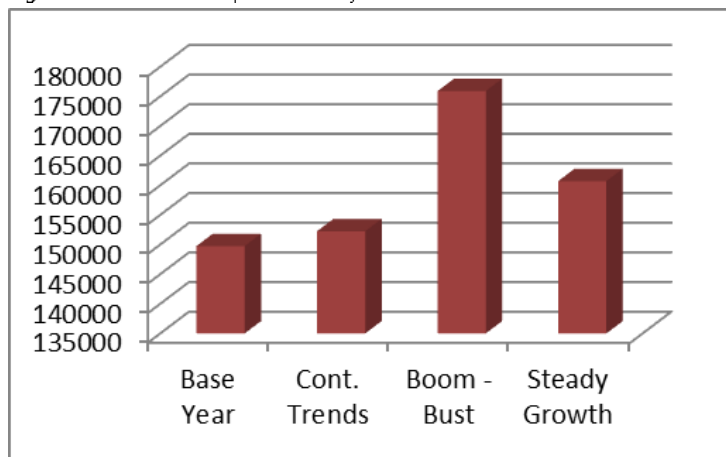
Recreation and civic events attract young adults to the region. (Source: Ice Breaker – Great Falls)

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

B. Economic Indicators

Comparing projected job growth with trends in the labor force highlights potential issues under different growth scenarios. Under the Continuing Trends scenario, concerns include an aging workforce, low paying jobs, and high unemployment on the reservations. In the boom-bust scenario, a severe workforce shortage is an issue.

Continuing Trends	Boom Bust	Steady Growth
Retail and hospitality are the main growth industries with some energy service jobs to support the oil and gas exploration in Canada and the Bakken.	There is a rapid increase in jobs in the oil fields that outpaces the ability of the local labor pool to fill.	Growth industries include value-added agriculture, renewable energy, tourism, construction and telecommuting.
The workforce is aging. New jobs are generally low wage service jobs.	There is a workforce shortage resulting in higher wages for even entry level service jobs in order to compete with oil field wages.	Workforce demands can be met by local labor pool and young adults returning to the area along with in-migration.
Reservations have high unemployment due to distance from job centers.	Job loss occurs after 15 years as peak oil production declines.	There is a balance of higher paying professional/technical jobs with service jobs.

Figure 5.3: Scenario Projected Workforce in 2035
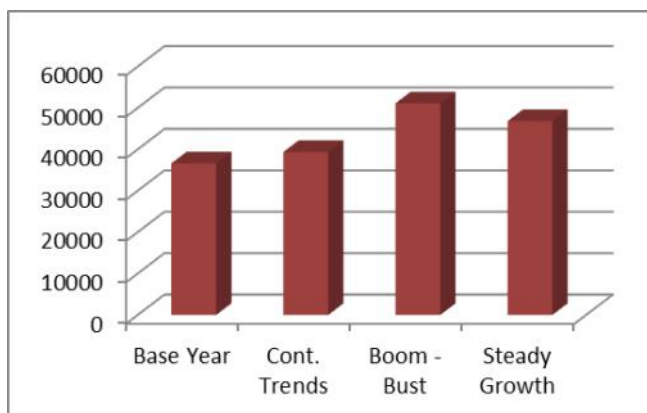
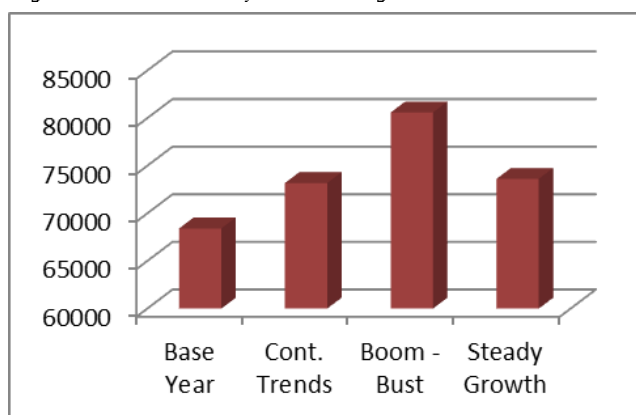

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

A skilled labor force is critical to economic growth.

C. Housing Indicators

Meeting housing demand for rental units and the housing needs of young families is a concern in all of the scenarios, but is much more pronounced in the Boom-Bust scenario. Housing cost dramatically increases in the Boom-Bust scenario. Energy conservation improvements help maintain housing affordability in the Continuing Trends and Steady Growth scenarios.

Continuing Trends	Boom Bust	Steady Growth
There is a rental unit shortage in hub towns and rural towns and overall housing shortage on the reservations.

An increase in assisted living centers is needed for the growing senior population. As seniors move out of single-family homes, these become available but will need energy conservation and other upgrades to modernize for young families.

 Rent and mortgage costs are stable but transportation costs increase due to longer commutes to get to work. | There is a severe housing shortage in rentals and single-family units due to new workers coming to the area to work in the oil fields. Man camps may need to be constructed to alleviate housing demands.

Rents and mortgage costs rise significantly as demand outpaces supply. Seniors may be priced out of market and have to leave the area. | There is a continued demand for rental units and newer single-family homes that can generally be met with new construction.

Housing costs increase but remain affordable and may be offset by lower transportation costs if more job opportunities are located closer to home.

Energy costs decrease as more homes are retrofitted with energy conservation improvements. |

Figure 5.4: Scenario Projected Housing Unit Demand in 2035
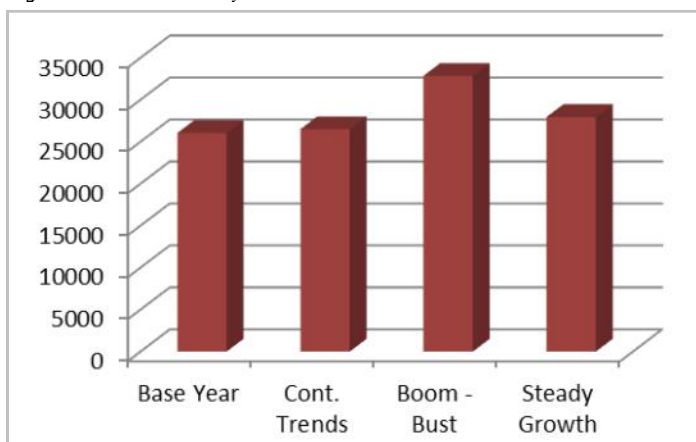

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

Rental units are in demand in all scenarios.

D. Social Indicators

In all of the scenarios, small towns lack the population base to support medical services, and residents must travel to nearby hub towns or county seats to access health care providers. In the Boom-Bust scenario, health care services are stressed due to higher population and work related accidents in the oil fields.

Continuing Trends	Boom - Bust	Steady Growth
As the school age population declines in the rural towns, there is a consolidation of schools.	Schools are at or over capacity in areas that are experiencing rapid population growth.	A moderate increase in the school age population supports local schools.
Residents of small towns that lack the population base to support a hospital or clinic must travel to hub towns for medical services. There is a shortage of doctors in rural areas.	Rapid population growth increases demand for medical services, especially emergency or trauma care. The demand outpaces the ability of local hospitals and clinics to provide services.	Health care services are still concentrated in hub towns but due to investment in broadband there is more opportunity for telemedicine.
Rural residents require medical services for high rates of chronic illnesses.		

Figure 5.5: Scenario Projected Number of School Children in 2035

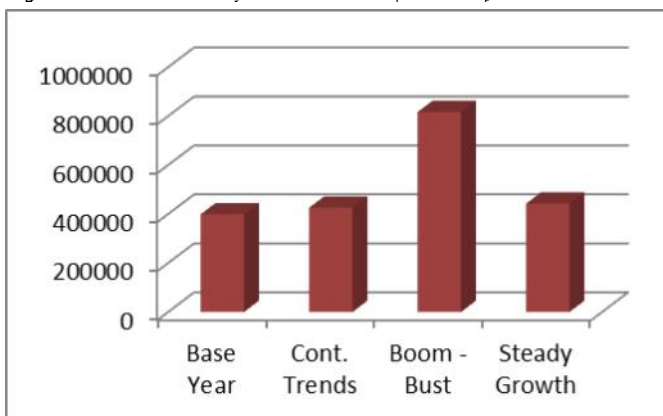*Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014*

Quality education for our children is a top priority - photo courtesy of the Havre Boys and Girls Club

E. Infrastructure Indicators

Moderate growth will provide additional tax revenues for infrastructure upgrades. Infrastructure systems have the capacity to accommodate moderate growth but lack the capacity for rapid growth that would occur in a boom-bust scenario.

Continuing Trends	Boom Bust	Steady Growth
Higher maintenance and repair costs for roads, due to increased labor costs, gas prices, and materials, outpace revenue from counties' road budgets. Deferred maintenance creates higher budget costs in the future. Aging water and sewer facilities require expensive upgrades to meet water quality standards, and many small towns do not have the tax base to support it.	Heavy truck traffic from oil fields requires paving of gravel roads plus more frequent maintenance and repair for all roads. Cost will exceed projected increase in tax revenues. Severe decline in level of service on roads due to lack of upgrades. Demand for water and sewer services exceeds supply as population soars above design capacity of small town systems. High demand for public safety services as crime and traffic incidents increase due to more population. Infrastructure upgrades are expensive to maintain after the boom due to declining tax base.	Higher maintenance and repair costs for roads due to increase in labor costs, gas prices and materials can be covered with increase in tax base from economic development in targeted clusters. Water and sewer systems have capacity for projected growth but still need expensive upgrades. Improved tax base will provide some but not all of expected revenue for upgrades.

Figure 5.6: Scenario Projected Vehicle Trips Per Day in 2035

Prepared by Opportunity Link, 2014

Gravel roads would need to be paved to handle truck traffic in a boom-bust scenario.

V. Using the Scenarios

While this chapter explores changes at the regional level, another use of the model is to test potential changes at the local level. Some applications of scenario planning include:

- Better understanding of the relationships between different system components

- Facilitating community dialogue by examining how different policies may influence future outcomes

- Identifying the optimum location for locating public facilities

- Analyzing the impacts of a proposed major development at the city or county level

- Identifying the best return on investment for different capital improvement projects

- Determining the best travel routes to reduce gas costs or travel time

- Generating marketing data for businesses

- Fostering potential partnerships or collaborations in the region to address common issues identified in the scenario model

- Determining suitability for proposed developments and facilities by use of map overlays

- Evaluating the traffic and fiscal impacts of different land use patterns

- Valuating the capacity of different infrastructures and social systems to accommodate growth

- Projecting job creation impacts for grant applications

Scenario planning does not predict a future. It is a tool to help us reflect on possible strategies to prepare for likely future outcomes and to be better prepared for changing conditions. By exploring multiple scenarios, communities can identify across-the-board strategies that apply to all of the scenarios and will ultimately accommodate a variety of future outcomes. For example, a need to upgrade water and sewer facilities was identified in every scenario. A strategy that would be appropriate to all scenarios may be to upgrade water and sewer plants to accommodate the current population trends but also design such facilities in a manner that will allow cost effective expansion in the eventuality of a population boom.

The real value of scenario planning comes from ongoing use of the model to generate economic and market data, analyze fiscal impacts, and discover cost efficiencies by comparing policy options. It is a tool that can be used by local governments, private businesses, and non-profits to understand how trends will impact their organization and to explore alternative courses of action.

Chapter VI: Goals and Strategies

I. Understanding Goals and Strategies

Goals and strategies are the heart of the regional plan; they flow from planning issues identified by residents and collectively describe a shared vision for the region. Goals and strategies provide the basis for implementation steps and offer benchmarks by which to evaluate the success of the plan.

- A goal is the most general statement. It sets the framework for strategies and implementation.

- The strategies outline steps for achieving the goal and can be applied to a variety of geographies and organizations.

- Implementation action items, in addition to establishing benchmarks, typically specify timeframes, where the strategies apply, and who will lead the effort.

As depicted in the graphic below, goals, strategies, and actions should emerge from a process of identifying planning issues and trends and then formulating the goal, strategy, and implementation framework to address these issues.

Figure 6.1: Relationship between Issues, Goals, Strategies, and Implementation

Issue Statement

Issues defined by:
Resident input
Data analysis
Assets
Needs

Goals

Goals address issues and are based on:
Community vision
Common themes
Public input

Strategies

Strategies refine goals and may include:
Coordination/Partnerships
Regulatory action
Pro-active measures
Best practices

Implementation

Provides framework for applying the strategies and describes the following:
Action steps
Timeframes
Lead agencies
Areas- regional, rural, urban, reservation
Benchmarks

Source: Opportunity Link, 2014

II. Unifying Principles

Our goals and strategies are grouped into five areas of focus (see Figure 6.2). These areas are a way to organize the hundreds of ideas gathered from residents and planners into a manageable framework. They reflect the planning priorities in the region and provide structure to the plan. Although this chapter describes issues specific to each area of focus, there are two overarching values that were common to all five and represent unifying principles for the plan.

Unifying Principle #1: Young people are the future of the region. The major outcome of the plan should be to attract and retain young adults and families to the region and engage them in the community in order to cultivate leaders for tomorrow.

Throughout all avenues of public input, there was a single principle that underlay all of the other concerns - the need to attract and/or retain young residents. Rural residents noted the steady progression of their communities towards older age. They recalled their children and grandchildren leaving for jobs and said that they wanted former residents to be able to return to work and housing in their home communities. They want new young families to migrate in, to bring new businesses, and to fill the local schools. Reservation residents noted the education and recreation needs of young residents and voiced concern that young people would not be able to find work or services in their home communities and would leave.

Residents visualized young workers seeking employment opportunities; families needing quality, affordable housing; parents wanting good schools and recreation for growing kids; web-based entrepreneurs relying on broadband access and parcel delivery services. Of course, younger community members who move away are missed, but even more pressing is the understanding that a community without young residents will continue to lose population and eventually disappear.

In summary, suggestions in all areas of focus were motivated by the unifying principle that a community must include residents *of all ages* in order to be sustainable. Young people—attracting them, supporting them, and retaining them—are the key to the future.

Unifying Principle #2: The region will accomplish more if it works together. Partnerships, collaboration, and coordination of efforts will be key to successful implementation of the plan.

Northcentral Montana has many small towns that are spread out across a large geographical area. Often, it is not practical for these communities to address problems in isolation. Communities that work together to pool resources, seek expertise, and leverage investment are more affective in achieving successful outcomes. Coordinated or collaborative efforts offer opportunities to address economic growth and quality of life issues at the regional level. Residents support coordinated local investments and strategic government action while sustaining the historic identities of our rural, tribal, and urban communities. The goals and strategies in this chapter represent a regional approach to solving common problems while retaining flexibility for communities to adapt the approach for local circumstances.

Figure 6.2. Areas of Focus

Regional Prosperity

- Job and Business Growth
- Tourism
- Workforce
- Main Street
- Broadband
- Energy

Community Vitality

- Housing
- Culture and Heritage
- Community Character
- Parks and Civic Spaces
- Commercial Services
- Healthy Neighborhoods

Physical Systems

- Roads
- Transit
- Drinking Water
- Wastewater
- Sidewalks and Trails

Social Systems

- Education
- Health Care
- Aging Services
- Youth Services
- Wellness
- Government Services

Natural Assets

- Water Quality
- Sustainable Agriculture
- Land Stewardship
- Land Use Patterns

III. Areas of Focus

A. Regional Prosperity

Figure 6.3. Components of Regional Prosperity

1. Why it matters

Region-wide prosperity is typically associated with a healthy economy that has good paying jobs and low unemployment. An economic base that is comprised of a diverse range of industries can withstand market cycles and is representative of a vibrant region.

An economy that offers diverse employment opportunities will attract the young adults who are critical to the region's future. A healthy economy also offers an avenue out of poverty for very low-income households.

Businesses are more likely to invest in a region that offers opportunity for growth. When businesses invest in the region, it increases the tax base, which generates revenue for infrastructure improvements that will benefit everyone.

2. Issues and Trends

Job Growth – For the 10-year period between 2001 and 2011, the number of employees in the private sector in the region grew by 4.1% compared to 11.5% statewide. For the nine counties that do not include the regional hubs of Great Falls or Havre, employment declined by 2.9% during this period.[1]

Business Growth –

- For the 10-year period between 2001 and 2011, the number of business establishments in the region declined by 4.0%. This compared to an increase in business establishments of 10.5% statewide. In the region, only Hill County experienced an increase in number of businesses during this period.[2]

- The indirect economic benefits of creating jobs in rural and tribal communities can have a significant impact. The indirect effect is the impact the new business has when it purchases goods and services for the operations of the business, and the result of the new employees and business proprietors spending the new income they are now receiving, from the new business, within the community.[3]

Tourism – As the economy recovered from the recession, non-resident visitor spending more than doubled from 2010 to 2012 in the Central Montana Tourism Region. The top five categories for expenditures were gas, retail, restaurant/bar, hotel, and groceries.[4]

Workforce –

- Unemployment rates vary across the region. In January 2014, Montana's seasonally unadjusted unemployment rate was 6.3%. Northcentral Montana's unemployment ranged from 13.5% in remote Glacier County to 3.6% in metro-adjacent Chouteau County. Micropolitan Hill County unemployment was 7.7%, and metropolitan Cascade County was 5.4%. Remote agricultural counties had high worker outmigration over the past three dec-

ades due to job loss, and now show relatively low unemployment; Liberty and Toole Counties were under 5% in January 2014.[5] The rates also reflect a greater proportion of residents that are retired and no longer seeking employment.

- Unemployment problems may occur when worker skill sets are incompatible with available job openings. In Montana, there is a need to train workers in health care, technical occupations, computer, math, and management to meet labor force needs.[6]

Main Street – Ten out of 13 municipal growth policies that were reviewed as part of this project had strategies for main street and downtown revitalization. The Montana Department of Commerce administers the "Montana Main Street Program." In the region, Great Falls, Shelby, and Cut Bank are participating in the program.[7]

Broadband – There is a low level of broadband adoption, despite the region having the highest percentage of households served by fiber-to-the-home projects in the state. In the region, only an estimated 46% of households subscribe to internet at home. Out of 13 economic development regions in the state, this is among the lowest use of broadband internet. This compares to 62% of homes in Gallatin County and 60% of homes in the Helena area that subscribe to broadband.[8]

Energy – The Department of Commerce has estimated the economic impacts of various energy projects in the state. Some impacts of projects in the North-central Montana region include:

o Glacier and Rimrock Wind Farms will generate $17 million in annual property taxes.

o Montana-Alberta Tie Line (MATL) represents $162 million in capital expenditures and another $92 million in direct impacts from construction wages and spending in communities.

o Hydropower facilities at Gibson Dam and Rainbow Dam in Great Falls were upgraded at a combined cost of $255 million.[9]

Spools of fiber-optic for broadband in Fort Benton– Montana's State Broadband Website

Downtown Great Falls– Photo by Tim Austin

Rim Rock Wind Farm near Cut Bank– Photo courtesy of Flickr user footloosiety

GOAL
1 Work together to cultivate a strong, diverse economy that provides good paying jobs, employment opportunities for young adults, and a market for business growth.
STRATEGIES
1.1 Support projects, such as industrial parks, business retention efforts, and value-added agriculture, that build on regional strengths and will result in diversified job opportunities.
1.2 Facilitate new business start-ups through programs that develop entrepreneurship and business management skills.
1.3 Market the region to non-resident visitors by promoting cultural tourism and the region's natural amenities as well as undertaking projects to enhance the visitor experience.
1.4 Work with education and private sector partners to identify workforce skills and support collaborative efforts to develop training to meet industry needs.
1.5 Encourage local towns to participate in the revitalization of main street areas by adopting marketing, organizational, and design strategies.
1.6 Promote the deployment and adoption of broadband technology to better compete in the digital economy and create new jobs through applications of advanced technologies.
1.7 Encourage the growth of the energy cluster through development of renewable energy sources.
1.8 Encourage development of support service businesses for natural resource development in Canada, Montana, and North Dakota.
1.9 Encourage creation of jobs that allow opportunities to live and work in rural and tribal communities in order to support local economies.

B. Community Vitality

Figure 6.4. Components of Community Vitality

1. Why it matters

Vital communities attract new business and bring young adults back to the region with new jobs. Businesses invest in the community and generate revenue that supports growth throughout the region. When private enterprises make decisions to expand or build, they consider the regional market area, labor force, quality of life, and availability of services to support their business and employees.

Likewise, young professionals consider amenities that the entire region has to offer when deciding where to work and live. Community character is an important aspect of what makes an area desirable.

Supporting vital communities is a boost for all who live in the region.

2. Issues and Trends

Housing –

- While the 2010 Census indicated that vacancy rates in the region exceeded the statewide average, many of these units are old and in disrepair.

An examination of housing condition data indicates that 11% of the housing stock is rated as in "poor condition," compared to 6.6% statewide. Three counties have over 20% of dwelling units rated in "poor condition."[10]

- The population age 65 and over in the region increased by 3,415 people between 1990 and 2010 and is projected to keep growing. In Montana, 13.1% of the population is classified as having some type of disability. Six counties in the region have more than 15% of the population classified with disabilities indicating a need for senior and special need housing.[11]

- Energy bills are a significant part of housing cost. The Low Income Energy Program (LIEAP) is a program to help offset these costs. Weatherization efforts are another way to reduce energy costs.[12]

Culture–Heritage – There are National Historic Register listings for every county in the region. Cascade County has the most listings with 44, followed by Chouteau County with 22 listings, and Glacier County with 18 listings.[13]

Community Character – By encouraging building or site reuse, or repositioning, that is compatible and consistent with the existing neighborhood character, neighborhoods can remain attractive, cohesive, and distinct for residents now and in the future.[14]

Parks and Civic Spaces – An increasing number of studies indicate that properties located near an amenity such as parks or open space have higher resale values and consequently generate more property tax revenues.[15]

Commercial Services – People who live in rural towns and unincorporated places are more likely to drive to another community in order to access basic commercial services, such as grocery shopping, banking, pharmacies, and general retail services.

Healthy Neighborhoods –

•Analysis of public input indicated that community members equated healthy neighborhoods with being able to walk to places, such as schools and parks, as well as having low crime, well-maintained housing, and lack of blight (litter, junk cars, weeds, dilapidated buildings, etc.).

•Communities that lack full-service grocery stores and neighborhood food markets have less year-round access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Addressing these needs is important to support healthier lifestyles.[16]

3. Community Vitality Goals and Strategies

GOAL	
2	Foster vital communities throughout the region where people want to raise families, where businesses want to invest, and where young and old citizens can thrive.

STRATEGIES	
2.1	Meet the housing needs for all segments of the population by increasing homeownership opportunities and providing more rental units, adaptive living options for seniors and persons with disabilities, affordable housing choices, and housing for the special needs population.
2.2	Improve housing choices for low-income households by working with housing agencies to provide affordable and subsidized housing units dispersed throughout the community.
2.3	Rehab and retrofit housing to remove hazards, improve energy efficiency, and increase market value to encourage private investment.
2.4	Eliminate impediments to fair access for safe and affordable housing by providing training and outreach to landlords, lenders, potential homebuyers, homeowners, and renters.
2.5	Support local food systems through direct marketing to local retailers, farmers' markets, community gardens, and farm-to-table programs and through improved service to areas that lack convenient access to fresh food markets.
2.6	Celebrate and promote small town character and the cultural heritage of communities through historic preservation, cultural events, support of the arts, and cultural tourism.
2.7	Foster healthy neighborhoods and preserve small town character through community revitalization activities such as removal of blight, housing rehab, and property maintenance.
2.8	Recruit commercial services and offer incentives for local businesses in rural communities in order to reduce driving and make small towns more desirable places to live.
2.9	Promote park systems that meet the diverse recreation needs of different age groups, contribute to community life, encourage healthy lifestyles, and benefit the environment.

C. Physical Systems

Figure 6.5. Components of Physical Systems
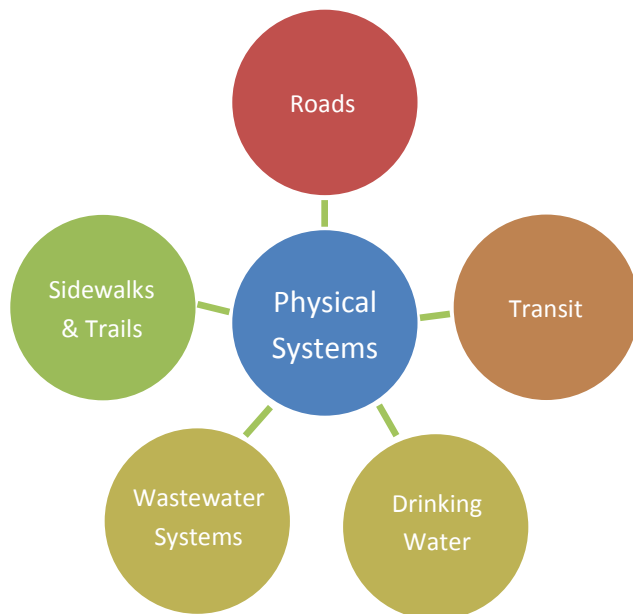
1. Why it matters

Well-maintained physical systems with sufficient capacity for projected growth are critical to the health, safety, and welfare of a community. Safe roads will result in fewer accidents and drinking water free of contamination is essential to public health.

In order to provide effective physical systems, infrastructure must be designed to meet current standards and be well maintained. Often, investment in modern facilities will lower operating and maintenance costs and result in long-term savings.

To finance infrastructure upgrades, communities rely on revenue from the property tax base and user fees. While economic growth can enhance the tax base, it can also increase service demands that require expensive upgrades. Growth must be balanced with the system capacity by using management tools such as capital improvement plans and fiscal impact analyses.

2. Issues and Trends

Roads – Miles of county paved and unpaved road. (Data to be inserted).

Drinking Water Systems –

- A review of 48 public drinking water system reports for municipalities and water districts in the region for the year 2013 indicated that eight systems detected some level of contamination requiring corrective measures. Twenty-five systems, more than half, had monitoring and testing violations that ranged from minor to severe.[17]

- Sustainable Communities' technical assistance providers compiled assessments of 12 small town drinking water systems in Northcentral, MT. Five systems had recently completed upgrades. Three systems identified a need for improvements but did not have a plan for the upgrades. There was a general need to update the source water assessments and to improve asset management practices.[18]

Wastewater Systems – The "Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund" emphasizes review criteria related to water quality, public health impacts, and green infrastructure. In FY 2013, 16 projects from the region were submitted and ranked for funding. Five of the projects were ranked in the top 33% and were most likely to get funded. Twelve of the projects involved secondary treatment components while nine projects were for major sewer system rehabilitation.[19]

Sidewalks/Trails – In a 2012 study for the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) regarding transportation and livability, "pedestrian facilities and ease of walking access" was mentioned as important by MDT officials, elected leaders, public input, and stakeholder groups.[20]
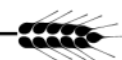
Transit –

- A survey of five of the rural transit systems in the region indicated that the most common reason for riding transit (37%) was to save money. Almost half of respondents (48%) did not own a car and 57% were over the age of 55.[21]

- In the region, there are a number of rural transit systems and one urban system. The systems are listed to the right with 2012 ridership numbers if available.[22]

  o Blackfeet Nation Dept. of Transportation - 45,323
  o Great Falls Transit - 438,133
  o Glacier County Transit - Data not available
  o Liberty County Transit - 14,916
  o North Central Montana Transit - 19,536
  o Northern Transit Inter-Local - 4,495
  o Phillips County Transit Authority - 42,372
  o Toole County Transit - 3,593
  o Fort Belknap Transit - Data not available
  o Rocky Boy's Transit - Data not available

*Figure 6.6. Transit Routes in Northcentral Montana*

Source: Opportunity Link, 2009

GOAL	
3	Invest in physical systems that meet the needs of the region's populace by promoting public health and safety and by integrating different components of physical and natural systems in order to achieve long-term cost-effectiveness and lower environmental impacts.
STRATEGIES	
3.1	Promote a safe and well-maintained road network that supports growth and has a variety of mechanisms in place by which existing users and new developments pay their proportional share for road upgrades necessary to mitigate impacts of additional traffic.
3.2	Provide alternatives to automobile travel such as transit, safe walking and biking routes, intermodal connections to air and rail, and car pools, with a focus on safety and accessibility for all residents.
3.3	Support efforts to expand transit service, increase ridership, and identify new funding streams and partnerships that enhance transit operations.
3.4	Encourage street and neighborhood design that connects residents to services and creates sidewalks, bike paths, and other features that make walking and biking easier, safer, more convenient, and more enjoyable.
3.5	Design transportation improvements to promote connectivity with features that are compatible with community character.
3.6	Support innovative practices and partnerships to construct drinking water systems that can be managed to protect water quality, conserve water, and operate efficiently in order to remain affordable for households.
3.7	Promote wastewater systems that are economical, reduce pollution, minimize the risk to human health, and complement natural systems.
3.8	Coordinate the functions between drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, and open space systems to reduce environmental impacts and bring the highest level of benefits to the most people.
3.9	Design water and sewer plants to accommodate projected population growth in a manner that allows cost-effective expansion with a variety of mechanisms in place by which existing users and new developments pay their fair, proportional share for upgrades necessary to mitigate impacts of additional growth.
3.10	Encourage local governments to use tools, such as capital improvement plans and fiscal impact analyses, to determine logical and cost-effective strategies that will support new development.
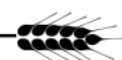
D. Social Systems

Figure 6.7. Components of Social Systems

1. Why it matters

Social systems typically address the health and well-being of citizens in the community.   Access to education and health care are major factors for households that consider relocating to a new area.

Demographic changes can have a significant impact on social systems, such as an aging population putting more demands on the health care system, or educational institutions responding to fluctuating trends in enrollment.   Local government services are those public services provided by counties, municipalities, and tribes on a community-based level. These services, such as libraries, senior centers, and police departments, all consider the demographic make-up of the community to determine what programs and services are necessary.

Agencies and institutions that provide health care, educational, and social services have been leaders in partnering with other agencies in the region to effectively meet the needs of their constituents.

2. Issues and Trends

Education – School enrollment in the region has decreased dramatically with an overall decline of 25% in the last 20 years from 1994 to 2014. Every county has experienced a decline in enrollment.[23] In contrast, tribal communities are experiencing increased enrollment.

Health Care – The federally designated Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) are one method of assessing health resource availability. HPSAs are designated areas or populations determined to have inadequate numbers of health professionals to serve the area's population. Nine counties in the region are determined to have a health care shortage in dental health professionals; all counties have a health care shortage of primary care professionals.[24]

Aging Services – The senior population is growing. According to the 2010 Census, no counties in the region had more than 30% of the population over age 60. In 2025, however, it is projected that seven counties in the region will have more than 30% of the population over 60. This will increase demand for health care, senior housing, and aging services.[25]

Youth – According to a survey of youth risk behaviors, more than 50% of high school students in Montana engaged in risk behaviors such as not wearing a bike helmet, smoking tobacco, alcohol use, marijuana use, and sexual activity without birth control. Approximately one-third of students reported depression, poor nutritional habits, bullying, and lack of physical activities.[26]

Wellness – A 2012 survey shows the top health concerns in the region are cancer, illegal drug use, overweight/obesity,   depression/anxiety,   and access to medical care.[27]

Local Government Services –

• Low population numbers and sparse population density make service delivery expensive in rural

communities. Several decades of net outmigration and low birth rates have led to consolidation of basic services, such as schools and medical care, from rural communities to distant hub communities. Local governments are finding innovative ways to provide services through mutual aid agreements, equipment sharing, and other forms of collaboration.

- "The work of the Montana Board of Crime Control can be compared to a three-legged stool. The first leg represents crime prevention, and the second leg is statewide work with law enforcement agencies and justice system officials. The third leg represents efforts to improve community safety. Without any one of these areas – alone and in combination with one another – the agency could not be effective in its efforts to improve public safety."[28]

All topics – Survey respondents indicated that the top factors for a healthy community were good paying jobs, good schools, access to health care, and strong family life.[29]

3. Social Systems Goals and Strategies

GOAL	
4	Foster communities where residents have access to quality health care professionals, educational opportunities, social services, and local government services that meet the needs of all age groups and promote healthy lifestyles.
STRATEGIES	
4.1	Coordinate with local school districts and higher education institutions to support quality education for residents of all ages.
4.2	Coordinate with health care providers to improve access to health care services through transit services, telemedicine, and other innovative practices.
4.3	Partner with agencies that provide aging services to help seniors lead active, healthy, and fulfilling lives and to make it feasible for seniors to remain in their homes and communities.
4.4	Work with schools and youth organizations to identify community resources and activities that will offer youth an alternative to high risk behaviors.
4.5	Work with non-profit organizations and health care providers to identify community resources and activities that will support families and promote healthy lifestyles.
4.6	Encourage partnerships among communities to institute innovative, cost-effective practices to provide local government services to all segments of the population.
4.7	Incorporate design elements into parks, public spaces, and new development that encourage fitness and mobility and that accommodate people with disabilities.
4.8	Coordinate with law enforcement agencies on community efforts that will promote public safety and healthy neighborhoods.

E. Natural Assets

Figure 6.8. Components of Natural Assets

1. Why it matters

The region's natural features are linked closely to the values that community members expressed during the roundtables and workshops. Phrases such as wide open spaces, small town character, clean air, clean water and rural lifestyles were mentioned frequently. In a review of local growth policies, protecting water quality and preserving agricultural land were common recommendations.

The region's fertile land is the basis of the agricultural economy. The unique and exceptional natural beauty of the region attracts residents and visitors alike. Mountains and streams host abundant wildlife and fisheries. Wind, solar, and hydro resources offer potential for growth in the renewable energy sector. Both residents and planning documents recognize that protecting these assets is important for economic growth and for the health of our communities.

2. Issues and Trends

Water Quality –

- Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires states to identify water bodies where quality is impaired. According to the list of impaired water bodies in the region, the most likely type of impairment in Cascade County is contamination from heavy metals and industrial contaminants due to past mining and industrial activities. Sedimentation related to the dams on the Missouri is also an issue. In rural counties, the most likely source of impairment is sedimentation of nitrogen/phosphorus, alteration in streamside cover, and low flow.[30]

- "More than 75% of Montana's assessed rivers and streams and 45% of its lakes, reservoirs, and wetlands fail to meet state water quality standards largely as a result of the effects of Non-point pollution."[31]

- Through activities such as education, restoration projects and community engagement, watershed groups have been successful in bringing together a wide range of stakeholders to develop local solutions to address water quality issues. There are six active watershed groups in the region.[32]

Sustainable Agriculture –

- Wheat, hay, and barley crops are the major crops produced in the region but, recently, there has been some modest diversification in crops. The acreage for pulse crops (peas, lentils, and garbanzo beans) increased from 15,200 acres in 1993 to 126,000 acres in 2013. According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture, 95,376 acres in the region were planted with organic crops.[33]

- More communities are adopting policies that promote local food systems and improve citizens' access to Montana foods through direct sales, famers' markets and farm-to-table initiatives. From 2002 to 2007, direct sales of agricultural

products in the region increased by 18%. From 2007 to 2012, direct sales in the region increased by 57.5%.[34]

Land Stewardship –

- Floodplain management is critical for public health and safety and to prevent property damage. According to the State of Montana Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan, five cities in the region (Malta, Browning, Fort Benton, Chinook, and Chester) have between 26% to 38% of buildings in areas at risk of flooding. The Town of Belt has 70% of buildings in at risk areas.[35]

- The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Brownfields Cleanup and Redevelopment Program helps communities revitalize polluted and/or contaminated properties by mitigating potential health risks and restoring economic vitality to areas where Brownfields exist. In the region, there are nine active Superfund sites and 21 inactive sites. Additionally, there are 339 active "leaking underground storage tanks" (LUST) sites requiring some level of remediation.[36]

Land-Use – Downtown development can significantly increase the tax-base of a community. A study for Great Falls, Montana, determined that the average value for the downtown core was $2 million per acre compared to a range of $300,000 to $800,000 per acre for big box stores and shopping centers.[37]

3. Natural Assets Goals and Strategies

GOAL	
5	Preserve and enhance assets such as clean water, rural landscapes, rural lifestyle, and the agricultural economy to allow the younger generation and visitors to enjoy the unique natural attributes of the region.

STRATEGIES	
5.1	Promote best management practices in agricultural and construction projects to minimize contamination of rivers, streams, and lakes.
5.2	Educate residents and land owners on measures to reduce non-point pollution and on initiatives for protecting source water for drinking water systems.
5.3	Work with watershed groups to coordinate activities between stakeholders on educational projects, volunteer projects, and grants to improve overall water quality in the region.
5.4	Support the agricultural economy in the region and innovative practices that allow for diversification and access to new markets for farm producers.
5.5	Promote activities that increase residents' access to fresh foods from the local food system.
5.6	Work with local governments to minimize impacts from flooding by updating regulations, reducing stormwater run-off through natural drainage systems, discouraging development in floodplains, and educating landowners to protect property.
5.7	Work with local governments and landowners to assess potential brownfield sites, to identify resources to remediate contamination, and to develop reuse strategies.
5.8	Preserve farm land by encouraging new developments to locate in close proximity to city services with convenient access to shopping, parks, and other services and by promoting in-fill development and redevelopment opportunities.

Sources

1. U.S. Census, *County Business Patterns*, 2001-2011

2. Ibid

3. MT Dept. of Labor, "*Montana Economy At A Glance*," April 2013

4. University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, *Non-resident Travel Survey Data*, 210-2012

5. MT Department of Labor and Industry, *County Unemployment Rates*, January 2014

6. Montana Dept. of Labor and Industry, Research and Analysis Bureau, "*Montana Economy at a Glance*," July 2011

7. MT Department of Commerce, *Montana Main Street Program*

8. Montana Broadband Program, "*Montana Broadband Regional Planning*," 2011

9. MT Dept. of Commerce, "Economics of Energy Development," 2013

10. MT Department of Commerce - Board of Housing, "*White Paper: Housing in Montana*," 2012

11. United States Census Bureau, *Disability Data*

12. *Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services*

13. U.S. National Park Service, *National Register of Historic Places*

14. City of Great Falls *Growth Policy Update*, 2013

15. American Planning Association, City Park Forum Briefing Papers, "*How cities use parks for...Economic Development*," 2002

16. Grimm A. K., et al. "*Access to Healthier Food Retailers—United States*," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011

17. MT Dept. of Environmental Quality, *Public Water Systems Data*

18. *Montana Operation and Maintenance Technical Assistance Report*, Rural and Tribal Environmental Solutions, 2013

19. *Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund*

20. *Livability for Montana Transportation*, 2012

21. Smith, S. "*Reasons for Riding Public Transportation in Rural and Frontier Montana*," Western Transportation Institute, 2013

22. Montana Department of Transportation, "*Transportation Facts*," 2012

23. Montana Office of Public Instruction, Enrollment *History Data*, 1987-2014

24. Department of Public Health and Human Services, *Data for Community Health Assessments*, Region 2

25. Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, Aging Services Reports, "*Aging Population Maps 2000 to 2030*," 2010

26. Office of Public Instruction, "*Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey: High School Results*," 2013

27. North Central Montana Healthy Communities Collaborative, Cascade County Community Health Needs Assessment Report, "*Building Healthy Communities*," 2013

28. MT Board of Crime Control, *Biennial Report*, 2012-2013

29. North Central Montana Healthy Communities Collaborative, Cascade County Community Health Needs Assessment Report, "*Building Healthy Communities*," 2013

30. Dept. of Environmental Quality, *Clean Water Act Information Center*, Integrated Reports

31. MT Dept. of Environmental Quality, "*Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan*," 2012

32. *Montana Watershed Coordination Council*

33. U.S. Census of Agriculture, *County Level Data*, 2012

34. Ibid

35. State of MT Disaster and Emergency Services, *Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan*, 2013

36. Dept. of Environmental Quality, *Brownfields Program*

37. Great Falls Business Improvement District Analysis, 2012

Chapter VII: Implementation

I. Introduction

Taken together, the goals and strategies comprise the overall vision for the region. This implementation chapter describes specific action steps, suggested by participants from across the entire region, that could make this vision a reality. Here, we identify the tools, programs, and projects that would facilitate implementation of the plan, and we identify partners and resources for each action step. Many of the action items listed here require the completion of a series of tasks and depend on the involvement of multiple organizations, government agencies, and the private sector to be successful.

This action plan includes recommendations or "action items" that communities may choose to implement. Each community in the region can decide to pursue action items that reflect their local needs and can determine how best to proceed with the resources available to them.

The action items outlined in this chapter represent different types of priorities in terms of regional impact, community need, and ease of implementation. By evaluating these factors, communities can determine the initial projects they may want to undertake.

This action plan is a starting point for implementation and will evolve over time to respond to emerging community needs and changing priorities. Some steps can be achieved relatively quickly, while others

- ♦Introduction
- ♦Organizational Structure
- ♦Action Items
   - ♦Regional Prosperity
   - ♦Community Vitality
   - ♦Physical Systems
   - ♦Social Systems
   - ♦Natural Assets
- ♦Next Steps
- ♦Indicator Report Card

will be long term endeavors. Certain action items have been identified as having a "catalytic" effect on the region, due to their potential to generate maximum regional impact and to benefit multiple areas of focus.

To assist communities in measuring their success in implementation efforts, we have included an Indicator Report Card to help communities measure changes over a period of time. The Indicator Report Card is a tool to facilitate a community dialogue on priorities, successes, and areas that need improvement.

Implementation of the regional plan is an on-going process. It will be challenging. It will require hard work. The success of the plan will be determined by the positive outcomes that result from this effort. This chapter lays the groundwork for accomplishments that will create a vibrant future for this region.

"There is community awareness, but taking action is key to helping the community thrive."
Source: Vibrant Futures Survey Comment

II. Organizational Structure

In order for this regional plan to be successful, it must maintain a clear focus, reflect local needs, and leverage unique contributions from a wide range of partners. By breaking down planning goals and objectives into concrete action items, we hope to build on the momentum of engaged stakeholders. We have tried to identify the partners and resources needed to complete action items, in hopes that successful community actions may sustain our efforts long enough to coordinate key plan elements region-wide. The following partners will play vital roles in implementing this plan.

1. Consortium and Advisory Council Members

The regional plan is not a government plan. Therefore, we encourage county, tribal and municipal governments, and non-profit agencies to incorporate elements of this plan into their individual policies. We encourage localities to consider regional plan elements as local priorities for implementation. Additionally, the regional plan can be used as a tool for supporting applications that communities submit to secure funding, or resources, for projects identified in this chapter.

2. Opportunity Link, Inc.

Opportunity Link, the lead agency in applying for and administrating the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant that funded the development of the regional plan, will act as an advocate for advancing implementation by providing on-going coordination, facilitating communication between consortium members, compiling data and related documents, and evaluating outcomes. Through the year 2016, Opportunity Link will provide the following services in support of plan implementation:

- Convene consortia members, regional entities, advocacy groups, and economic development corporations to present progress on the plan's goals; provide networking opportunities; promote collaboration; and support implementation of strategies and action items

- Act as an information clearinghouse and communicate progress to the consortium

- Identify project opportunities and propose to partners

- Encourage and facilitate cross-jurisdictional applications for funding

- Request technical assistance desired by consortium members

3. State and Federal Agencies

Upon request, the federal Sustainability Partnership between HUD, DOT, and EPA will provide technical assistance to communities within the region, in order to build capacity for plan implementation. Such assistance will help communities build partnerships, increase technical abilities to support and implement projects, and leverage new funding sources for projects. Federal grant applications to HUD from consortium members can also receive additional points as credit for participating in this regional planning process. Additionally, the Montana Department of Commerce's recent Community Development Block Grant applications include livability criteria to evaluate applications.

III. Action Items

In June 2014, consortium members participated in a full-day workshop to develop action items for each of the five areas of focus. Participants divided into work groups to brainstorm action items including details such as potential stakeholders, process, funding, and timeframe. Facilitators compiled the list of proposed action items for each focus area, and work group members assessed action items in terms of regional impact, feasibility, and critical need. Following is a summary of the action items that were developed through this process to address strategies in Chapter 6.

Regional Prosperity: Jobs, Business Growth, Tourism, Workforce, Main Street, Broadband, Energy

Action Item 1:

Develop community broadband model

Create a model for community broadband plans that includes local strategies. Organize a regional technology/broadband summit to provide education on the model and share best practices with a focus on employment/job creation and telework opportunities, virtual offices, and applications for telehealth and e-government. This action was estimated high in regional impact, high in need, and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.6, 1.9, 4.2, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Telecom/broadband providers, Job Service, economic development agencies

Resources: Broadband providers

Action Item 2:

Develop bicycle tourism

Promote bicycle tourism in the region. Research other regional efforts that promote bicycle tourism and document the economic benefits as well as the needs of bicycle tourists. Assess the assets of communities to meet those needs and identify infrastructure gaps. Develop and map designated routes with trails, various area activities, and community features such as downtown landmarks. Research connections with Amtrak and work with local businesses to cater to bicycle tourists. This action was estimated moderate in need and impact and easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.3, 1.5, 1.9

Timeframe: Ongoing

Stakeholders: Chambers of Commerce, Montana Department of Transportation, Local Government, MT Tourism offices, Parks and Recreation, MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, Bike Walk Montana, Adventure Cycling Association, Western Transportation Institute

Resources: MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, Recreational Trails Program, MT Office of Tourism, Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP), National Endowment for the Arts

Action Item 3:

Establish business incubators in tribal communities

Identify communities with highest unemployment rates and provide basic services to support regional growth. Investigate other tribal models for business development. Conduct needs assessment to determine "basic services" in community to support project. Build capital and identify land. Include educational component such as job-training, entrepreneurial training, and peer-to-peer exchange. Provide marketing assistance. This action was high for regional impact, high need, and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 1.1, 1.2, 1.9

Timeframe: Long-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Tribal government, tribal colleges, tribal development corporations, business partners, local economic development group

Resources: Administration for Native Americans (ANA), Social and Economic Development Strategies (SEDS) grant, Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG), Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) and State Tribal Economic Development, program-related investments, Kellogg Foundation, Shakopee Tribe

Action Item 4:

Seek grant funding for small businesses to increase equity assets so they can use such assets to leverage private financing

Create a framework to distribute grant funds and to provide small business support. Funds would target businesses in rural and tribal communities. A possible funder would be Department of Commerce. This was estimated moderately high for impact and need, and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.2, 1.9

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: MT Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration, local and regional economic development agencies, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA)

Resources: State and federal funding to initiate program and loan payments from small business revolving loan fund program, Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), Indian Community Economic Development (ICED), program-related investments from foundations, donations

Action Item 5:

Promote community-driven neighborhood projects as best practice models

Identify neighborhood or downtown improvement projects that use state of the art construction techniques with energy efficient/renewable technologies. Incorporate environmental designs such as playgrounds that use the natural terrain. Identify skills for project construction and work with higher education institutions and workforce training to develop programs for these job skills. Work through community housing organizations and local governments to identify needed projects. Completed projects can be models of best practices for other neighborhoods. This action was ranked high for impact and need, and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Local governments, local housing agencies, colleges, workforce training offices, Chambers of Commerce, Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), neighborhood groups

Resources: Community Development Block Grants, communities, philanthropic organizations

Action Item 6:

Promote regional tourist attractions to encourage longer stays in the region

Identify specialty trails that connect attractions in the region such as the Dinosaur Trail or Grandeur of the Rockies. Inventory the region's "points-of-interest" and develop marketing materials to generate interest. Promote rural communities' downtown businesses and local festivals. Coordinate with hotels and communities to establish a campaign to "stay one more night" to visit such attractions. Provide technical assistance to travel-related businesses to have them help promote travel and shopping at local businesses within the region. This was estimated as having moderate need and impact and being moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.3, 2.6

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Tourism businesses, Chambers of Commerce, MT Office of Tourism, museums, outfitters, recreation associations, visitor bureaus, Department of Commerce

Resources: MT Office of Tourism grants, lodging tax, regional tourism office, and visitor bureaus

Action Item 7:

Create a telework clearinghouse

Provide online database for telework opportunities. Work with MT Dept. of Labor Job Service postings to include a category specific to telework. Work with regional businesses to identify opportunities for telework and how to implement programs for their companies. Encourage local communities to incorporate strategies for telework in their CEDS and growth policies. This action was estimated moderate in impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.6, 1.9

Timeframe: Ongoing

Stakeholders: Job service, telecommunication providers, Main Street Montana Project, MT Department of Labor, local economic development agencies, private sector

Resources: Funding from Department of Labor (DOL), Economic Development Administration (EDA), state and federal agencies

Action Item 8:

Implement a "Return to Rural" campaign

Seek examples from other regions that have attracted young adults to return to rural communities. Develop a model plan that would include a curriculum/outline for communities to institute a "return to rural" program. Include entrepreneurial training and networking opportunities. Recruit local businesses to attract young adults and families. This action was estimated moderate in impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.2, 1.9

Timeframe: Ongoing

Stakeholders: Chambers of Commerce, Farmers Union, local development organizations, economic development agencies

Resources: Heartland Leadership Institute, local sponsors, regional and state agencies

Action Item 9:

Train the workforce in jobs related to energy efficiency

Create partnerships to train workforce to retrofit older housing stock and public facilities with energy efficient improvements. Coordinate with housing agencies to promote programs for homeowners to undertake energy efficient improvements. This program can be instituted region-wide including urban areas, rural communities, and tribal communities. It would reduce energy costs for residents and public agencies; it would improve workforce skills in construction trades; and, it would create jobs in the construction industry. It has the added benefits of extending the life of older homes and encouraging other investments in home upgrades, thereby improving the tax base. Public agencies would be able to save on energy costs. This action has the potential to be a catalytic project because it promotes strategies in multiple areas of focus. It was estimated moderately high for impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.4, 1.7, 1.9, 2.3, 2.4, 3.6, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term, identify partners; mid-term, secure funding and implement

Stakeholders: Homeowners, vocational education programs, utilities, contractor trades, job service

Resources: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program, MT Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), Economic Development Administration (EDA), Department of Energy (DOE), utility companies, Energy Corps, building supply stores

Camelina seeds in raw form at the Earl Fisher Biofuels facility in Chester, MT. Residents recommended more processing centers for raw crops produced in Northcentral Montana. This would not only have an impact on natural resources, but the regional economy as well.

The Roxy Theatre in Choteau, MT. Residents created Action Items around developing and promoting local icons, historical centers, and fun activities to support a "Stay One More Night" campaign for attracting visitors to the region.

Action Item 10:

Advocate for a Housing Montana Fund

Lobby state legislature to fund expanded housing programs that serve rural and urban areas. Urge state agencies to create a funding mechanism for multi-county applications. Support construction of rental units, workforce housing, senior housing, home ownership, and housing rehab. Seek commitments from local leaders and housing agencies to provide information in support of the measure. This action was estimated high in impact and need and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 2.1, 2.3

Timeframe: Underway, ongoing

Stakeholders: Housing agencies, local leadership, economic development agencies

Resources: Montana Coalition for Housing and Infrastructure, Montana Department of Commerce–Housing Division

Action Item 11:

Sponsor a "Community Clean-Up" program

Sponsor a "Community Clean-Up" program to remove blight and dilapidated buildings. Task each community to identify neighborhoods where there is need for blight removal. Investigate programs such as the federal brownfield programs, state junk vehicle program, and CDBG funds. Inventory best practices from other regions and states and share information with rural towns. Encourage communities to include blight removal strategies in growth policies to support community revitalization. This action was estimated moderately high impact and need and easy to implement.

Strategies: 2.7, 5.7

Timeframe: Ongoing

Stakeholders: Local and Tribal governments, housing agencies, property owners, economic development districts

Resources: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), state and federal programs, code enforcement agencies

Action Item 12:

Complete a Housing Needs Assessment

Create baseline housing needs assessment to determine existing inventory and demand for more units. Document the need for rural subsidized housing, assisted living, rental units and adaptive living options for seniors and persons with disabilities. Identify options for meeting needs such as working with builders to construct more units for seniors, educating landlords about rehab of existing units, and incorporating adaptive living features in new housing units or rehabs. Accurate, timely data will support housing agencies to create affordable, subsidized units and inform local growth policies. This action was estimated high in impact and need and easy to implement.

Consider a joint application for a planning grant to conduct a multi-county needs assessment.

Strategies: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Landlords, civic associations, local and tribal governments, planning boards, developers, housing agencies

Resources: Local match, Community Development Block Grant Planning Funds, Big Sky Trust Fund, USDA Rural Housing Programs, Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division, CAP Coalition

Action Item 13:

Increase regional Fair Housing outreach and education

Create a Fair Housing outreach and education campaign to reduce impediments to fair access. Build on regional Fair Housing Equity Assessment (FHEA) to target areas with discrimination concerns or complaints. Coordinate with Montana Fair Housing and the MT Department of Commerce Housing Division to identify existing programs and gaps. Develop Fair Housing training for lenders and realtors. Encourage communities to include Fair Housing goals and objectives in their local growth policies. This action was estimated as high in impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 2.1, 2.4

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Renters, homebuyers, landlords, lenders, realtors, property managers, housing agencies, local governments

Resources: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division, Montana Fair Housing, nonprofit housing agencies

Action Item 14:

Form cooperatives for local commercial services

Work with the Montana Cooperative Development Center (MCDC) to offer training to local communities and entrepreneurs to develop cooperatives that could provide commercial services to rural towns. Cooperatives are a form of business that is non-profit, user-owned, and user-controlled. Provide basic services, such as fresh foods, retail shopping, banking, and other needs, to make small towns more desirable places to live and to reduce driving. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 2.5, 2.8, 5.5

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Local leaders, investors

Resources: Montana Cooperative Development Center

Action Item 15:

Develop homeownership programs on reservations

Create homeownership programs through tribal housing authorities to improve home ownership options for moderate income households. Look at model programs on other reservations. Gain approval of tribal councils. Attend housing coalition training to help housing authorities build capacity and access new funds. Work with regional agencies to access technical assistance for this and other housing programs. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and need and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 2.1, 2.2

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Tribal housing authorities, tribal councils, homebuyers

Resources: Tribal Housing Authority, state and federal programs, North West Montana Housing Coalition, Montana-Wyoming Indian Housing Coalition, Opportunity Link, Federal Reserve Bank, Native American Development Corporation (NADC), NeighborWorks Montana

Action Item 16:

Boost downtown revitalization

Conduct downtown expo for rural communities to identify funding sources for downtown plans, design guidelines, and revitalization projects. Have representatives from state and federal agencies conduct training and provide technical assistance on grant applications. Bring marketing professionals to work with communities on branding and promotion. Planning professionals can review growth policies and recommend downtown strategies. Downtown revitalization projects attract visitors, increase tourism, and improve tax base. This action was estimated high for need, moderate in impact, and easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.5, 2.6, 2.7, 5.8

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Local government, Chambers of Commerce, downtown businesses

Resources: Montana Main Street Program, Montana Office of Tourism, State Historic Preservation Office, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), Economic Development Administration (EDA), Big Sky Trust Funds, Historic Preservation Tax Credits, private sector investments, tax increment finance districts

Action Item 17:

Map parks, recreation, and trails to create a regional "wayfinding" path

Use GIS mapping to inventory trails, parks, historic sites, and amenities throughout the region. Coordinate with local trail projects. Mapping would provide a basis for planning a regional trail system and creating informational signage. Regional trail maps could be marketed to adventure cyclists and tourists. This action could have catalytic impact because it promotes strategies in multiple areas of focus on a region-wide scale. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.3, 2.6, 2.9, 3.4, 4.5

Timeframe: Long-term

Stakeholders: Local government, park and recreation departments, tourism officials, local businesses, recreationists, public health

Resources: Montana Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program (TIIP), Fish Wildlife and Parks Recreational Trails Program, private sector contributions, Montana Department of Transportation Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) funds, Montana Land Information Act (MLIA) grants for GIS, private foundation grants

Action Item 18:

Coordinate transportation planning and funding efforts to improve road networks

Encourage municipal, county, and tribal officials to participate in MDT Transportation Coordinating Committees in non-metro areas to identify road projects that promote safety, connectivity, and context-sensitive design. Encourage localities to amend growth policies to include goals and objectives that support such projects, with funding mechanisms that ensure new developments pay proportional shares of transportation improvements. This action was estimated as moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.1, 3.4, 3.5

Timeframe: Ongoing

Stakeholders: Local elected officials, public works departments, county road departments, transit agencies, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), local planners

Resources: MDT, local transportation coordinating committees, Montana Association of Planners

Action Item 19:

Improve coordination between local transit services

Coordinate local transit systems for activities such as scheduling, interconnection opportunities, and planning. Joint planning will identify potential expansion of transit services to provide alternative modes of travel and address needs of seniors, people with disabilities, and non-drivers. Coordinating among transit providers and employers could help address workforce needs in the region. Joint purchasing could result in cost efficiencies. Encourage localities to include goals. This action was estimated as moderate in need and impact and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 1.8, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Community members, local transit systems, MDT, agencies serving senior and disabled populations, local governments

Resources: MDT, U.S. Department of Transportation, Area Agencies on Aging, private employers

Action Item 20:

Expand local transit services

Expand transit services by identifying opportunities to expand routes, add new stops, and make interconnections between different transit services. Identify new funding streams and partners to support new services. Conduct needs analysis to determine demand for and feasibility of new services.   An area that was identified for potential expansion was in west Hill County to provide services to Inverness, Rudyard, and Hingham and possibly Liberty County residents.   Liberty County Transit was identified as a potential lead for this action. This action item was estimated as moderately high in need and impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Community members, local transit systems, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), agencies serving senior and disabled populations, local governments

Resources: MDT, U.S. Department of Transportation, Liberty County Transit

Action Item 21:

Support local sidewalk improvements

Adopt design standards to promote streets, sidewalks, and trails that accommodate people with mobility difficulties (such as seniors/disabled) and provide safe walking routes to schools and other community destinations. Inventory sidewalk network to identify potential improvements. Encourage localities to amend growth policies to include goals and objectives that support sidewalk efforts. Coordinate sidewalk improvements with road construction projects. This action was estimated as moderate in need and impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 4.7, 5.8

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Local governments, planners, public works, road departments, schools, MDT

Resources: MDT Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) program, fuel tax funds, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - Public Facilities, tax increment finance funds, public health grants

Physical Systems: Roads, Transit, Drinking Water, Wastewater, Sidewalks, Trails

Action Item 22:

Expand local trail systems

Develop plans to expand trail systems that promote fitness and provide convenient walking access to parks, shopping, and other services. Work with schools and health care officials to identify best routes and potential funding sources. Include trail improvements in new residential developments. Encourage localities to include goals, objectives, and maps for local trails in growth policies. Identify civic groups and volunteers who can donate labor and supplies for trail building. Coordinate region-wide trail planning. This action was estimated as moderately high in need, moderate in impact, and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.2, 3.3, 3.5, 4.5, 4.7, 5.8

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Local government officials, planners, public works, road departments, park and recreation departments, schools, public health officials, recreation groups

Resources: Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP), Fish Wildlife and Parks Recreational Trails Program, U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER Grants, local fundraising and donations, park mill levy, tax increment finance funds, parkland dedication funds, public health grants

Action Item 23:

Provide training for rural water and wastewater systems

Conduct training for rural water and wastewater systems to assist adaptation of innovative, cost-effective practices; upgrades to accommodate growth; and improvements to water quality. Potential topics may include:

- Projecting future needs for water and wastewater systems
- Achieving cost efficiencies by integrative design between drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater systems
- Incorporating concepts that complement natural systems
- Developing innovative partnerships and financing techniques
- Managing aqua tank collection, containment, and treatment

This action was estimated high in need and impact.

Strategies: 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 5.3, 5.6

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Rural water districts, rural wastewater systems, public works staff, planners, local officials, community members

Resources: Local district training funds, grants, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Montana Rural Water Association, Montana State University-Northern, Opportunity Link, Partnership for Sustainable Communities

Action Item 24:

Improve infrastructure for emergency situations and response

Ensure that critical infrastructure is adequate for emergency situations and to build resilient communities. Review municipal, county, and tribal disaster preparedness plans. Work with local governments to update plans as needed. Identify needs for critical infrastructure in the region and seek opportunities for multi-jurisdictional collaboration to address infrastructure needs. Facilitate discussions to develop joint projects and identify potential funding mechanisms. This action was estimated as moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.1, 3.10

Timeframe: Underway, ongoing

Stakeholders: County departments of emergency services, public safety officials, rural fire districts, local government officials, public works and road departments, flood plain managers, planners

Resources: Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA), Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

Action Item 25:

Create "Information Clearinghouse" with community mapping to facilitate planning for infrastructure

Compile information on cost-benefit models, fiscal impact models, asset management, and other resources to help communities plan for future infrastructure needs. Develop interactive web site with community-based maps to indicate location of model projects in the region, and to allow communities to post questions and share information about innovative practices. Sharing information will allow local and state officials to take a regional perspective. This action was estimated moderately high in impact and need and was considered moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.8, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Local and tribal governments, water districts, wastewater system operators, public works departments, planning departments

Resources: Opportunity Link, Montana Land Information Act grants, GIS Departments

Action Item 26:

Establish apprenticeship programs

Establish apprenticeship paths at the high school level to connect with university systems and provide more youth opportunities while building a skilled workforce. Develop technical programs to match industry needs (e.g. welding, mechanics, CNA). Work with higher education systems to embed pathways from high schools to community colleges. Create strong partnerships between programs and industry to develop graduate employment opportunities. Seek legislative funding. This action was estimated high in need and impact but difficult to implement.

Strategies: 1.4, 4.1, 4.4, 4.6

Timeframe: Underway, ongoing

Stakeholders: State Department of Labor, school districts, higher education, unions, industry, economic development agencies, Job Service, workforce training partners

Resources: U.S. Department of Labor, MT Department of Labor and Industry, legislature, private industry, Montana State University-Northern

Action Item 27:

Complete local Community Health Needs Assessments

Conduct regional analysis of local community health needs assessments to identify potential collaboration on mutually identified health needs. Combine survey data from all regional hospitals to obtain regional health profile; identify commonalities and differences to help health providers tailor services to community needs. Coordinate assessments with regional hospitals to comply with the requirements of the Affordable Care Act and provide an ongoing framework for coordinating health care needs. This was estimated high in need and impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 4.2, 4.3, 4.5, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Hospitals, Montana Office of Rural Health, MT Department of Public Health and Human Services, health care clinics

Resources: Montana Office of Rural Health is potential lead agency

Action Item 28:

Develop tele-health presentations

Offer tele-health presentations in rural areas and Indian reservations to increase access to health education and health care for professionals and community members. Coordinate tele-health connections among reservations and/or towns. Identify presenters and health care providers to provide workshops. Coordinate with public health officials to identify issues and develop training. Evaluate workshops and classes to improve future offerings. This action item was estimated as moderate in need and impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 4.2, 4.5

Timeframe: Underway, ongoing

Stakeholders: Healthcare providers, tribal staff, tribal community members, patients

Resources: Benefis Hospital is a potential lead. Healthcare providers in region, Indian Health Service, MT Department of Public Health and Human Services, county public health departments, state and federal grants

Action Item 29:

Create regional leadership institute

Help communities recruit and train future leaders through a leadership institute that encourages partnerships and innovative practices for providing local services to rural communities. Solicit input from communities on high-demand topics; develop training to meet the unique needs of the region. Include management skills useful in both public/private sectors. Identify community projects to promote cultural heritage and strengthen bonds to community. Conduct outreach to people in existing leadership positions and also to young and future leaders. Evaluate effectiveness and determine interest in future trainings. This action item was estimated as moderate in need and easy to implement. It has the potential to have a catalytic impact due to regional implementation and benefits in multiple areas of focus.

Strategies: 1.2, 2.6, 4.6

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Local governments, Chambers of Commerce, non-profit agencies, educational institutions, professional organizations

Resources: Opportunity Link, private foundations for funding

Action Item 30:

Appoint community equity task force

Appoint task force of citizens and leaders to review, identify, and make plans to address regional social disparities. The task force should have broad representation from social service providers, public officials, low-income households, and segments of the population in need of services. The task force will define its mission, review existing data, and identify priority community concerns. The group will brainstorm ideas and develop a roadmap of action for the local community. Plans can be coordinated among multiple cooperating communities. This action item was estimated as moderate in need and impact and easy to implement.

Strategies: 4.1 through 4.8

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Community leaders, human resource agencies, non-profits, low-income households, seniors, youths, families, education, law enforcement, people with disabilities

Resources: Public agency funding

Action Item 31:

Expand rural child care

Expand child care centers in rural areas to support young working families and to allow them to raise children in small communities. Research a business model for child care facility start-up. Identify communities in need of child care services. Provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs. Identify potential financing and building sites. This action was estimated as moderately high in need and easy to implement.

Strategies: 2.8, 4.5

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Chambers of Commerce, families, employers, human resource agencies

Resources: Private financing, grants

Action Item 32:

Assess mental health services

Assess need for mental health services. Develop business plan for rural communities with high need. Use flexible and innovative approaches such as tele-psychology for mental health consultations. Coordinate with current mental health providers to identify potential collaboration. This action was estimated as high in need and difficult to implement.

Strategies: 4.2, 4.5

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Mental health providers, health care organizations, human resource organizations, county public health offices

Resources: Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, patient fees, insurers, private foundation grants, state and federal grants
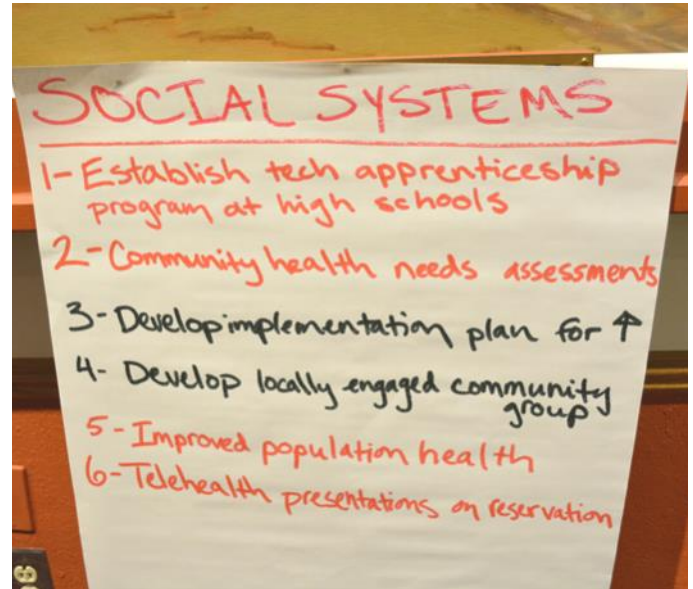
During the regional Implementation Session, residents brainstormed projects, partners, and resources that would help put plan strategies into action.

A young girl watches and learns traditional dances at the Rocky Boy Pow Wow. Cultural education is a large part of developing strong social systems in our region. Photo by Lindsay Brown.

Action Item 33:

Expand processing and shipping options for value-added pulse crops

Create more facilities for value-added processing and shipping of pulse crops. Find producers and companies with expertise in pulse crops and develop relationships to support commercial ventures. Identify locations close to producers, reduce distance to market, and accommodate industrial facilities for value-added processing. Work with communities to provide infrastructure and incentives for facilities. This action was estimated high in regional impact but could be difficult to implement.

Strategies: 1.1, 1.9, 5.4

Timeframe: Long-term

Stakeholders: Agricultural producers, agricultural processing companies, economic development agencies

Resources: Montana Department of Agriculture programs, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs and grants, Cooperative Extension, Economic Development Administration (EDA) grants, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Public Facilities, Big Sky Trust planning funds

Action Item 34:

Clean up abandoned gas stations and other brownfield sites

Promote brownfield program to assist landowners with assessment and clean-up of contaminated sites. Conduct outreach and education to disseminate information on benefits of program and address concerns regarding liability issues. Identify re-use development potential for brownfield sites. Build on brownfield programs by Bear Paw Development, Sweet Grass Development, and Great Falls Development. Encourage growth policy updates to support brownfield cleanup. Develop grant applications for brownfield funds. This action was estimated as moderate in need and impact and easy to implement.

Strategies: 2.7, 5.7

Timeframe: Underway, ongoing

Stakeholders: Economic development agencies, land owners, realtors, local government

Resources: Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant programs, MT Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), private business , Kansas State University's TAB (Technical Assistance to Brownfields Program)

Action Item 35:

Create community scholarships

Offer incentives such as student loan assistance to entice young adult workers back to rural areas, particularly to work in the agriculture sector. As agricultural producers retire, there is a need to attract young adults to farming, health care, teaching, and other professional positions in small towns. Communities could start a scholarship or student loan repayment program and target the professions of highest need. Counties could pool resources for a collaborative program. This action was estimated as moderate in need and impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.9, 2.8, 4.2, 5.8

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Employers, families, young adults

Resources: AmeriCorps, employers, schools, Chambers of Commerce, donations, private foundations

Action Item 36:

Develop small farms

Provide technical assistance and support to encourage small farm development for non-commodity crops. Small farms could supplement other household income with fresh produce for sale in local markets. Small farmers could form a cooperative to market products. Work with agriculture community to identify potential tracts of land for small-scale farming. Work with MSU Extension and USDA to provide education on small farming opportunities. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.1, 2.5, 5.1, 5.4, 5.5

Timeframe: Ongoing, long-term

Stakeholders: Agriculture producers and suppliers, rural communities, economic development agencies, young families

Resources: Montana Department of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), MSU Extension

Action Item 37:

Develop additional oil seed processing facility

Assess market and feasibility for expanded commercial-scale oil seed crushing and processing. Work with Bear Paw Development to build on research at MSU Northern Bioenergy Research Lab to construct biofuels plant(s) along the Hi-Line. Work with producers to expand oil seed crops (e.g. camelina and canola) for processing. Identify operator(s) and potential facility sites. Research best practices to determine funding sources and markets for biofuels production. Determine regional use for product, such as public transit and safety services. This action was estimated high in impact and difficult to implement. It has the potential to have a catalytic impact due to the high regional impact and benefits across multiple areas of focus.

Strategies: 1.1, 1.7, 1.9, 3.3, 5.1, 5.4

Timeframe: Long-term

Stakeholders: Agricultural producers, economic development agencies, local government, transit systems

Resources: Montana State University-Northern BioEnergy Research Lab, Bear Paw Development Corporation, Montana Department of Agriculture, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Development Administration (EDA)

Action Item 38:

Determine economic impact of region's natural areas

The region has a number of premier natural areas, such as the Rocky Mountain Front, Upper Missouri Wild and Scenic River National Monument, and the proposed prairie reserve being developed by a non-profit group. Protection of these areas has been contentious. It would benefit stakeholders to work together to determine how natural amenities act as an economic asset to the region. Conduct economic impact study to quantify the contribution of natural areas to the regional economy and determine how to best promote tourism and other conservation-oriented jobs. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.3, 2.6, 5.2, 5.3, 5.8

Timeframe: Short-term

Stakeholders: Economic development agencies, public land agencies, environmental groups, Chambers of Commerce, land owners, local governments

Resources: Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Big Sky Trust planning grants, local match, private foundation grants, United States Forest Service (USFS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

Action Item 39:

Build greenhouses for fresh produce all year

Build greenhouse facilities to grow fresh produce year round. Research best practices, develop business plan, and find investors and operators. Market produce to local stores or through direct sales to customers. Work with programs that promote fresh produce and local foods. Coordinate this action with Action Item 35. This action was estimated as moderate in impact and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 1.1, 2.5, 5.5

Timeframe: Long-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Agriculture, consumers, local markets, restaurants, school lunch programs, health care

Resources: United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Bountiful Baskets, farmers' markets, public health grants

Action Item 40:

Implement source water protection and Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) plans

Work with local governments and watershed groups to conduct educational workshops on recommended best practices for source water protection and TMDL plans. Encourage local governments to incorporate recommendations from the plans into growth policies. Provide public information on non-point pollution and local measures of water quality. This action was estimated moderate in impact and need and moderately easy to implement.

Strategies: 3.6, 3.8, 5.3, 5.6

Timeframe: Short-term, ongoing

Stakeholders: Public water drinking systems, local governments, watershed groups, consumers, planners

Resources: Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Montana Rural Water Systems, Montana Watershed Coordination Council

Action Item 41:

Work with communities to certify flood control levees

The Army Corp of Engineers no longer evaluates and certifies flood control levees. A number of communities in the region have aging levees and lack of certification makes it difficult to obtain flood insurance. Identify communities impacted and document costs of conducting engineering studies and levee upgrades. Work with legislative representatives to seek federal and state funds for improvements. This strategy was estimated as moderate in impact and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 5.6

Timeframe: Long-term

Stakeholders: Local government, homeowners, levee districts, elected officials, engineers, economic development corporations

Resources: Federal Emergency Management Associates, legislators, property taxes from levee districts

Action Item 42:

Support regional water projects

Support regional water projects such as the Saint Mary Canal Working Group and the North Central Montana Regional Water System. Participate in working groups and tasks forces, and write letters of support as needed. Conduct outreach in local communities to generate awareness of projects and build support. Encourage municipal, county, and tribal governments impacted by projects to incorporate recommendations into growth policies. This action was estimated high in impact and moderately difficult to implement.

Strategies: 3.6, 3.9, 5.1, 5.4

Timeframe: Ongoing, underway

Stakeholders: Irrigators, drinking water systems, local government, Rocky Boy Reservation, Blackfeet Reservation, Bureau of Land Management

Resources: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Congressional Delegation, Tribes

IV. Next Steps

In the summer and fall of 2014, Opportunity Link released the Draft Regional Plan and held an outreach campaign that included making presentations to local communities and soliciting comments on the plan. Based on these comments, minor revisions were made to the plan and the Advisory Council forwarded the final version to HUD on January 2015. With completion of the plan, the next step is to commence efforts to implement the recommended strategies in the plan. Collaboration, as well as actions by individual consortium members and stakeholders, will be the key to successful implementation.

The Regional Plan is a tool for communities to respond to change while sustaining a vibrant local economy and high quality of life for residents. The value of the plan will result from communities using this tool. Implementation will be most effective when communities identify creative, new, and exciting ways to adopt strategies to meet the unique needs of their towns, counties or agencies.

Meaningful progress will depend upon the support and participation of the citizens, businesses and institutions that comprise our region.

The Regional Plan is a framework and does not mandate any particular action or outcome. The extent to which the strategies are utilized will depend on available resources and local priorities. Furthermore, it may take some time to integrate the concepts and objectives of the Plan into the work of consortium members. The Plan should be viewed as a resource and opportunity for establishing new partnerships and collaborations.

Implementation is an ongoing process. Over time, tasks are completed, priorities change, and new opportunities arise. Many of the initiatives described in this plan have multiple tasks, stakeholders, challenges, and considerations. There will be a continual need to review progress and to identify new opportunities to implement the goals and objectives. The report card is a tool to help assess progress. The completion of this plan is a starting point to achieve the goal of a vibrant future for our region.

The current implementation work plan can be viewed on the Vibrant Futures website. Implementation progress and reporting will also be made available from the website.
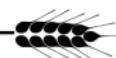
III. Indicator Report Card

The following "report card" was developed as a tool to provide counties within the region with baseline data to assess their strengths and weaknesses and to evaluate progress over time. The data is downloadable on the VF [website](#). It is anticipated that each county will use the data to rank their status on the various indicators. The tool will be available for local governments to periodically update and compare results to the baseline information as a measure of progress.

	Strength	Good: Continue to Improve	Caution: Needs Improve-ment	Regional Weakness: Needs Attention
Regional Prosperity				
Employment growth over last 10 years compared to state average[1]				
Business establishment growth compared to state average[1]				
Lodging Tax growth compared to regional average[2]				
Unemployment rate compared to state average[3]				
Growth in jobs in the professional/technical and health care sectors[1]				
Growth policies in the county have information on downtown and policies to support main street[4]				
County ranking for percent of homes with broadband download speeds greater than 25mbps[5]				
Number of renewable energy projects in county[6]				
Community Vitality				
Percent of housing stock rated as poor or fair condition compared to state average[7]				
Percent of owner-occupied vs. renter-occupied housing units compared to state average[8]				
Number of residential units accessible to persons with disabilities, or demonstrating universal design for future adaptations, funded with housing tax credits[9]				
Policies supporting equitable access for persons with disabilities included in growth policies[4]				
Denial rate for mortgage loan applications from Native American applicants compared to state average[10]				
Number of rent-subsidized housing units (Section 8 or NAHASDA units) available to low income residents[11]				
Number of Historic Districts and listings on the National Historic Register[12]				
Growth policies with goals and objectives related to community character[4]				
Growth policies that include both an inventory of parks and policies regarding parks[4]				
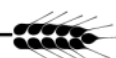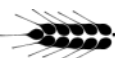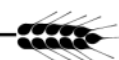
	Strength	Good: Continue to Improve	Caution: Needs Improve-ment	Regional Weakness: Needs Attention
Physical Systems				
Trends in highway crash data[13]				
Trends in transit ridership[14]				
Trends in number of public water systems reporting contamination or monitoring/testing[15]				
Percent of wastewater projects in the county that successfully applied for grants for upgrades[16]				
Inventory/map of existing and proposed trail systems included in growth policies[4]				
Decrease in percentage of people who drove to work alone[17]				
Social Systems				
No Child Left Behind - # of schools in county that made adequate yearly progress[18]				
Percent of high school graduates continuing on to post-secondary education compared to state rate[19]				
County classification as "Health Care Professional Shortage Area"[20]				
Per capita licensed adult day care beds for 65+ population[21]				
Local growth policies have information on youth trends and policies to address needs for this population[4]				
Obesity rates compared to statewide average[22]				
Percent of all adults reporting their general health status as "fair" or "poor"[23]				
County has adopted or updated a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan in the last five years				
Natural Assets				
Number of water bodies covered by a TMDL or watershed planning group[24,25]				
Amount of direct sales of agricultural products to consumers in the county[26]				
Number of acres in organic crops[27]				
Number of farms with produced and sold value-added commodities compared to statewide rankings[28]				
Number of local governments participating in FEMA Community Rating System program[29]				
Number of census tracts classified as food deserts[30]				
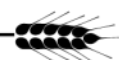
Data Sources for Report Card:

1. U.S. Census Bureau, *County Business Patterns*

2. Montana Department of Commerce, *Montana Office of Tourism*

3. *Montana Department of Labor and Industry*

4. Vibrant Futures - *Local Growth Policies Review*

5. FCC *National Broadband Map*

6. *U.S. Energy Information Administration*

7. *Montana Department of Housing*

8. United States Census Bureau 2010 Census; *ACS 5-year survey*

9. Montana Department of Commerce Montana Housing *Tax Credit Program*

10. U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, *Home Mortgage Disclosure Act data*

11. Montana Dept. of Commerce , PBS8 Properties; NAHASDA property # from *Tribal Housing Authorities*

12. *National Register of Historic Places*

13. Montana Department of Transportation, *Crash Data*

14. Montana Department of Transportation, *Transportation Facts*

15. Montana Department of Environmental Quality, *Drinking Water Watch*

16. Montana Department of Environmental Quality , *Water Pollution Control State Revolving Fund*

17. U.S. Census – *American Community Survey* (DP03)

18. Montana Office of Public Instruction, *Adequate Yearly Progress*

19. Montana Office of Public Instruction, "*Post-Secondary Student Tracker Report*"

20. Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, *Office of Epidemiology and Scientific Support*

21. Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, *Adult Day Care Facilities*

22. Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, *Office of Epidemiology and Scientific Support*

23. Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services, *Office of Epidemiology and Scientific Support*

24. Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality, *Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL)*

25. *Montana Watershed Coordinating Council*

26. United States Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, *Table 2*

27. United States Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, *Table 42*

28. United States Department of Agriculture, Census of Agriculture, *Table 43*

29. Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Community Rating System Communities*

30. United States Department of Agriculture, *Food Access*

Appendices

Appendix A
Glossary of Terms

Best Management Practice (BMP) - BMP's are practices that have been adopted to minimize non-point source water pollution from forestry, agricultural and construction activities. While not required by regulation, the use of BMP's has been widely accepted by the forest products industry, producers, tribal and other agencies. The use of voluntary BMP's has proven to be an effective tool in limiting non-point pollution.

Brownfield - The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines brownfields as real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.

Capital Improvement Plan - A Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is a budgeting and financial tool used by a local governing body to establish public works rehabilitation and maintenance priorities and to establish funding for repairs and improvements. The CIP includes planning, setting priorities, effective public works management, financial management, and community decision process.

Cost-benefit Analysis - An analytical method whereby the actual and hidden costs of a proposed project are measured against the benefits to be received from the project.

Community Transportation Enhancement Program - Federal highway funding has required that a certain portion of funds be set aside for non-motorized transportation related improve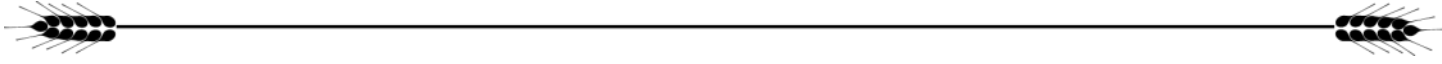ments. Such improvements can be trails, pedestrian enhancements, landscaping, interpretive signs or historic preservation measures and other similar improvements. The current transportation bill will have a new funding process for local governments.

Flood Zone - Flood zones are geographic areas that the FEMA has defined according to varying levels of flood risk. These zones are depicted on a community's Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) or Flood Hazard Boundary Map. Each zone reflects the severity or type of flooding that is likely to occur in the area.

Fiscal Impact Analysis - A report projecting the public costs and tax revenues that will result from a proposed program or development.

Green Energy (Clean Energy) - Clean energy technologies increase supply of energy from renewable sources, improve efficiency of energy use, and bring new energy processes into the marketplace. Clean energy includes energy efficiency and clean energy supply options like highly efficient combined heat and power as well as renewable energy sources.

Impervious Area - Impervious area is primarily comprised primarily of pavement surfaces such as asphalt, concrete, brick, and stone that are used for construction of roads, sidewalks, driveways and parking lots. Impervious surfaces are a concern because they prevent rainwater infiltration and natural groundwater recharge. Stormwater run-off from impervious surfaces contains non-point pollution from gasoline, motor oil, pet waste, sediment and other debris. The warm runoff from impervious surfaces reduces dissolved oxygen in stream water, mak-

ing life difficult in aquatic ecosystems. Impervious surfaces can create urban "heat islands" and increase energy consumption in buildings.

Non-Point Pollution - Non-point source (NPS) water pollution comes from contaminants (originating from a variety of land-use activities over generally large areas) that are transported to streams, lakes, wetlands, and groundwater by precipitation, snowmelt, and stormwater runoff. Non-point pollution also comes from substances that erode directly into surface waters or from aerially transported substances deposited on land and water. Common non-point pollutants include sediment, nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus), temperature changes, metals, pesticides, pathogens, and salt.

Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plans (PDM) - PDM Plans are funded by the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA). These plans and projects are intended to reduce overall risks to the population and structures from natural and man-made disasters, while also reducing reliance on funding from actual disaster declarations. They typically include an inventory of community emergency resources, an assessment of risks, and strategies to respond to different types of disasters.

Sustainable Agriculture - Sustainable agriculture was addressed by Congress in the 1990 Farm Bill. Under that law, "the term sustainable agriculture means an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term: satisfy human food and fiber needs, enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends, make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls, sustain the economic viability of farm operations, enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole."

Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) - A TMDL is the maximum amount of a pollutant a water body can receive and still meet water quality standards. The goal of measurement of TMDLs provides benchmarks for water quality standards in all of Montana's streams and lakes, and is intended to support improved water quality for state-designated beneficial use.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) - Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is one of the most widely used measures of travel intensity and vehicle activity. For a given segment of roadway, the VMT is obtained by multiplying average daily traffic by the length of the roadway segment. Reduced VMT is an official goal of the Clean Air Act (CAA), the President's 1993 Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), and the Congestion Mitigation Air Quality Improvement Program. It is included in both the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), U.S.C. 23, Section 149.

Watershed - A watershed is any sloping surface that sheds water. Often, the term refers to a drainage basin or area of land that discharges its surface waters through a single outlet or stream. A large stream like the Missouri River can drain a huge land area and encompass a watershed of thousands of square miles. The watershed approach recognizes the geographic basin as a logical organizing entity for natural resource management. Participants in watershed groups come from diverse backgrounds and hold varying perspectives and concerns. Identifying shared values and finding opportunities for agreement is central to the watershed approach.

Wellhead Protection Area - The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) defines a Wellhead Protection Area as: "the surface and subsurface area surrounding a water well or wellfield, supplying a public water system, through which contaminants are reasonably likely to move toward and reach such water well or wellfields." The size of the WHPA varies from site to site

depending on a number of factors, including the goals of the State's Program and the geologic and hydrogeological features of the area. Source water assessments that have been completed for public water systems define the WHPA.

Wetland - Wetlands are the link between the land and the water. They are transition zones where the flow of water, the cycling of nutrients, and the energy of the sun meet to produce a unique ecosystem characterized by hydrology, soils, and vegetation—making these areas very important features of a watershed. Wetlands are valuable for providing flood and erosion control, enhancing water quality and providing wildlife and fish habitat.

Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) - The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is defined as the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. Typically, Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP), will define the WUI as, "the wildland-urban interface is defined as a group of homes and other structures with basic infrastructure and services within or adjacent to Federal land; in which conditions are conducive to a large scale wildfire event; and for which a significant threat to human life or property exists as a result of a wildland fire disturbance event."

	Acronyms and Abbreviations		
ACS	American Community Survey	CTEP	Community Transportation Enhancement Program
ACTION	Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation	DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
ADF	Au Dragon Forgé Steel Fabrication Company	Dept	Department
ANA	Administration for Native Americans	DNRC	Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
ARCO	Atlantic Richfield Company (formerly Anaconda Copper Mining Company)	DOE	Department of Energy
ATC	Accessible Transportation Coalition	DOL	Department of Labor
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs	DOT	Department of Transportation
BLM	Bureau of Land Management	DP03	Data Profile 03 (American Community Survey)
BNSF	Burlington Northern Santa Fe	DPHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
CAP	Community Action Program	HRDC	Human Resources Development Council
CCAC	Climate Change Advisory Committee	HUD	Department of Housing and Urban Development

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CDBG	Community Development Block Grant		**Hwy**	Highway
CDP	Census Designated Place		**I15**	Interstate 15
CEDS	Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy		**ICED**	Indian Country Economic Development
CNA	Certified Nursing Assistant		**IRS**	Internal Revenue Service
Cont. Trends	Continuing Trends		**LIEAP**	Low-Income Energy Assistance Program
CRM	Community Roundtable Meeting		**LIHTC**	Low Income Housing Tax Credit
CRS	Community Rating System		**RBEG**	Rural Business Enterprise Grant
LUST	Leaking Underground Storage Tank		**SDCM**	Sweetgrass Development Community Meetings
MATL	Montana-Alberta Tie Line		**SEDS**	Social and Economic Development Strategies
MCDC	Montana Cooperative Development Center		**SPW**	Scenario Planning Workshop
MDT	Montana Department of Transportation		**TMDL**	Total Maximum Daily Load
MLIA	Montana Land Information Act		**USCB**	United States Census Bureau
MSU	Montana State University		**USDA**	United States Department of Agriculture
MT	Montana		**USFS**	United States Forest Service
NAHASDA	Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 1996		**USGS**	United States Geological Survey
NFIP	National Flood Insurance Program		**VF**	Vibrant Futures
NREL	National Renewable Energy Laboratory		**WUI**	Wildland-Urban Interface
PBS8	Project Based Section 8		**WW1**	World War 1

Appendix B
Summary of Community Input

Blaine County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)
- Lower water and sewer rates
- Develop more retail, perhaps a cooperative store
- Expand child care
- Remodel City Courthouse, City Hall, Police Dept.
- Upgrade water treatment/sewer systems
- Seek access to affordable business loans
- Promote community attractions, events, businesses, and services
- Improve rest area, fair grounds, walking path
- Thinking/being more entrepreneurial
- Education/training for more skilled workforce
- Fiber optics with Triangle Communications
- UPS drop stop
- Revitalize Main Street
- Attract younger people with new ideas
- Business opportunity that would bring families to the community

Education
- Seek grants to improve heating/cooling systems in schools
- Increase support for students dealing with substance abuse issues
- Increase support for programs to assist people who have dire needs
- Establish a quality early childhood program
- Allow for preparation time for increasing standards in public school
- Increase opportunities for high school graduates through economic diversity economic diversification could address that
- Encourage families with school aged children to join the community

Employment
- Seek federal financing and lower interest loans for Main Street businesses
- Increase attractiveness of towns and drive traffic into downtown areas
- Expand Canadian Port hours

Energy
- Explore and develop energy options such as wind power, biofuel, gas, and oil
- Improve natural gas distribution system
- Prepare for potential oil and gas boom
- Support cooperation for start up wind projects, solar projects, coal production
- Negotiate transmission lines for wind projects
- Produce biofuels on larger scale
- Thin forests for wood fuel
- Create program to deliver wood to elders for heating fuel

Environment
- Enact environmental laws to protect clean air, water
- Fight noxious weeds (leafy spurge)
- Clean up Zortman-Landusky mines
- Secure clean drinking water for all communities
- Coordinate blocked railroad crossings and increase number of crossings
- Seek Community Transportation Enhancement Program funding for sidewalks

Health

- Educate doctors, staff, and community members about health needs
- Update wastewater system
- Improve ambulance and fire response
- Recruit younger firefighters and EMTs
- Use empty storefronts to develop community centers
- Train local First Responders/EMTs
- Establish local emergency medical facility
- Complete local 911 addressing
- Develop "Meals on Wheels" program for elders and improve food available at the Senior Center
- Improve water system safety
- Explore the need for a care center
- Improving access to and affordability of produce
- Improve access to health care

Housing

- Seek funding to increase housing options for young families, elderly, and Border Patrol Agents
- Develop more senior housing
- Coordinate with Fort Belknap to develop housing options
- Encourage investors to examine more rural areas
- Renovate existing homes
- Create senior citizen housing
- Utilize the trade programs from the tribal college
- Provide emergency housing for homeless
- Develop multi-family housing to take advantage of limited available lots
- Develop moderate to higher income housing
- Encourage commuters to buy and rent here
- Rejuvenate existing housing stock
- Mitigate flood plain problems

Transportation

- Seek funding to support public transit
- Encourage development of varied vehicle related businesses
- Build and maintain better roads including private and tribal
- Develop student housing to reduce commuting
- Increase safety of Highway 2

Parks & Recreation

- Develop plan to increase tourism
- Find local work programs to maintain playgrounds and canyon
- Build programs for children (Boys' and Girls' Club Supervisor, pool table, snack bar)
- Provide security at all times (lights on playgrounds, police patrols, summer park teachers)
- Build campgrounds in canyon
- Increase availability of parks for varied uses
- Develop community center

Other

- Increase police officers
- Increase child care programs
- Support public transit
- Increase tourist and residential attractiveness
- Review restrictions on expansion and building regulations such as those developed by the EPA and FWP
- Develop a plan to retain young families
- Investigate the development of a Community Watch program
- Create a communication hub to convey resident needs

Blackfeet Reservation Community Input

Economic Development (private business)
- Improve customer service; fast foods/Wal-Mart
- Increase family oriented business
- Increase funds for public infrastructure improvements
- Improve economic availability: bank loans, jobs, assistance filling out applications

Employment
- Improve employment opportunities
- Expand the hospital to support increased employment and business opportunities

Energy
- Explore water and wind energy opportunities
- Increase locally sustainable energy sources

Environment
- Improve lighting and security on road sides, trails, and parks
- Improve appearance of roadways through landscaping
- Increase number of parks and improve cleanliness

Health
- Improve mental health services for people.
- Establish new mental health and chemical dependency treatment facility

Housing
- Increase rental housing
- Establish a homeless shelter
- Improve or rebuild existing nursing home.
- Refurbish old buildings.
- Increase affordability and attractiveness of housing

Recreation & Parks
- Improve access to youth activities such as ice skating rink, swimming pool/outdoor
- Increase clubs and organized activities and sports leagues for adults and kids.
- Develop places where teens can go and hang out like a mall, a movie theater, etc.

Transportation
- Improve public transportation during the evenings and weekends.

Other Ideas
- Improve lighting, security, and neighborhood patrols to prevent vandalism and crimes.
- Improve and expand the food bank
- Explore development of Bachelor's degrees at Blackfeet Community College
- Develop a technical/trade school for job training and subsequent employment
- Improve sidewalks, public safety, and roads
- Support small businesses
- Protect environment for younger generations
- Increase resources for pregnant teens, housing, education, police, and job training

Cascade County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Adopt an "infill" program with policies and incentives to encourage development of vacant property
- Promote and enhance the post-secondary educational and technical training opportunities available in Great Falls
- Prepare a database and policies concerning the availability of publicly owned properties for development
- Prepare an action plan for the redevelopment and revitalization of the Downtown area
- Promote community amenities and attractions for economic development

Housing

- Support an equitable distribution of publicly assisted housing units throughout the community to avoid exclusive neighborhoods or subdivisions and give low-income residents more choices to live close to work, school, or services
- Expand housing inspection and code enforcement programs to promote neighborhood and community pride and ensure adequate maintenance of the housing stock
- Encourage mixed-use developments to provide increased housing opportunities, especially in the Downtown area
- Encourage the development of alternative housing types through innovative land use regulations or financial assistance programs, including attached single-family units, modular or manufactured housing, clustered housing, mixed-use developments, group homes, assisted living facilities, self-help housing, cooperatives, and others
- Allow diverse housing opportunities to meet the needs of the current and future population, including creative planned residential communities, with a reasonable mixture of single-family and multi-family units.

Environment

- Explore new, environmentally safe ways to keep streets safe for winter driving
- Require permits for grading/excavation, adopt standards, and Best Management Practices to control erosion, sedimentation, and dust
- Promote development options that preserve open space and water quality.

Community Facilities

- Great Falls School District's Safety Committee on conjunction with city and neighborhood councils review and, if necessary, update the walking routes, street crossings, and crossing guard locations previously identified by the Committee.
- Prepare and annually update a joint Capital Improvements Plan with Cascade County for infrastructure and other community facilities or services
- Integrate historical, geological, cultural, archaeological, and other information as exhibits or displays in city parks and other community facilities
- Conduct an extensive public education and outreach program on the value and community benefits of recycling
- Seek funding opportunities for the library to acquire new books and other materials

Intergovernmental Coordination

- Coordinate with the Montana Department of Commerce to establish a regional network of agencies and individuals involved in planning, growth management, economic development, technical education, and resource management
- Encourage self-supporting water, sewer and solid waste collection systems including appropriate

incentives for resource conservation
- Ensure that extensions or expansions of existing systems, facilities and services are made only after careful evaluation of all the impacts and that all services are distributed in an efficient and equitable manner

Land Use
- Encourage livable, walkable, visually and functionally cohesive neighborhoods that incorporate traditional design concepts
- Encourage physical elements that contribute to the individual identity of neighborhoods, such as natural features, historic and cultural resources, parks, schools, and other focal points
- Encourage new development projects that complement the unique aspects of the city's setting, character, and visual and scenic qualities

Transportation
- Create a comprehensive and fully accessible public transit system including streets, trails and walkways that are planned, built, landscaped, and maintained as safe and attractive public spaces linking a balanced system of open lands, natural areas, recreational facilities, schools, and parks with trails and urban streetscapes

- Carefully consider the traffic circulation and parking in Downtown Great Falls as the primary function of the Central Business District shifts from a retail area to a mixed-use area
- Identify methods to improve appearance, access, parking, physical condition, and the streetscape, such as signage and landscaping, of 10th Avenue South
- Ensure safety of teachers and students who walk or bike to school as well the hazards facing parents and others driving near the schools by mitigating traffic hazards, congestion, speeding, parking and other issues near schools
- Ensure cohesive, distinct, diverse, attractive, and safe neighborhoods with a compact land use pattern while considering transportation issues

Chouteau County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Create job opportunities for young people, year-round, wages higher than minimum wage
- Improve presentation of Main Street area to entice highway traffic
- Improve quality of older housing to attract new residents
- Improve water and sewer infrastructure to attract new businesses
- Maintain current businesses on Main Street
- Attract entrepreneurs who work from home via internet
- Attract young families and year-round residents
- Create incentives for hiring locally on new projects
- Continue infrastructure improvements
- Establish a land trust
- Expand local industry beyond agriculture
- Secure consistent, faster, Internet access
- Develop local veterinarian clinic
- Develop local auto/ag machinery mechanics shop
- Develop meat processing business
- Develop local law enforcement

Energy

- Encourage cooperation to start up wind projects, solar projects, coal production
- Negotiate transmission lines for wind projects
- Produce biofuels on larger scale
- Develop wind energy, water energy
- Develop transmission lines to energy markets
- Seek grants to develop alternative energy sources such as wind farms

Environment

- Pave roads and sidewalks
- Increase recycling
- Develop secondary water source
- Mitigate saline seep (alfalfa)

Health

- Create walking paths for exercise
- /increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables
- Improve services and housing to attract resident doctor
- Establish bus service to Great Falls

Housing

- Improve quality of older housing to attract new residents, increase value, and improve availability
- Develop a 4-plex apartment
- Develop senior housing such as a retirement home with medical and transit services
- Seek a benefactor (like Winifred or Harlem)

Parks & Recreation

- Create indoor recreation center for cold weather months
- Develop RV area between depot and railroad with water and sewer
- Place signage to direct visitors from rest stop
- Update community center to include youth center
- Develop walking/bike trail on old railroad between Geraldine and Great Falls

Transportation

- Pave streets and add sidewalks
- Coordinate with public transit from Havre to Great Falls
- Improve handicapped and railroad parking
- Encourage Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad to retain rail service
- Develop local transit system (8-passenger van)
- Improve options with existing transit systems
- Support Snowy Mountain Development's efforts to rebuild trestle and railroad
- Reopen airport
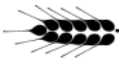
Chouteau County (Continued)

Other Ideas

- Create incentives or enforce town codes to persuade residents to clean up lots
- Attract a child care business
- Fund a municipal swimming pool for kids
- Upgrade sewer and water systems to attract new residents
- Grow vegetables year round; community gardens; farm-to-cafeteria program
- Create more forums for community involvement, share information about available resources and services
- Improve "curb appeal" by enforcing blight ordinance to clean up unkempt lots

Employment

- Encourage diversity to employers to better balance public vs. private businesses
- Attract service providers to keep local dollars in town
- Encourage the development of new ideas, businesses, and employment opportunities

Education

- Improve Internet access
- Provide assistance in locating housing in order to continue to attract teachers
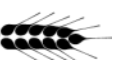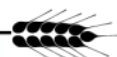
Fort Belknap Reservation Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Increase entrepreneurial thinking
- Business ventures overseen by their own body
- Provide education/training to increase workforce skills

Education

- Increase support for students dealing with substance abuse issues
- Explore programs to assist people who have dire needs

Energy

- Prepare for possible oil and gas boom

Environment

- Enact environmental laws to protect clean air, water
- Decrease noxious weeds (leafy spurge)
- Explore clean up options for Zortman-Landusky mines
- Secure clean drinking water for all communities

Gaming Employment

- Explore marketing strategies for customers outside of the community
- Establish lodging
- Improve facility
- Explore entertainment options

Health

- Increase education and training of medical personnel
- Provide health education for the community

Housing

- Seek funding to build homes
- Build multi-family housing

Transportation

- Seek funding to support public transit
- Have a Master Lube business here
- Build and maintain better roads, private and tribal
- Develop student housing to reduce commuting
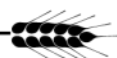
Glacier County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)
- Increase customer service; fast foods/Wal-Mart
- Encourage family-oriented business
- Seek funding for public infrastructure improvement and upkeep
- Increase economic availability: bank loans, jobs, assistance filling out applications

Employment
- Increase employment options
- Expand the hospital to increase job opportunities
- Encourage new businesses

Energy
- Investigate water and wind opportunities to increase locally sustainability

Environment
- Increase lighting on road sides for walking and biking
- Increase lights and security in the walking park
- Landscape our downtown streets and the road toward high school
- Increase number of parks and improve cleanliness

Health
- Improve mental health services for people
- Explore creation of a new chemical dependency treatment center

Housing
- Increase rental housing
- Develop a homeless shelter
- Explore development of a new nursing home
- Refurbish old buildings
- Increase affordability and attractiveness of housing

Recreation & Parks
- Provide youth activities through the development of new facilities such as ice skating rink or swimming pool
- Increase availability of clubs, organized activities, and sports leagues for adults and youth
- Develop places where teens can spend their free time like a mall or a movie theater

Transportation
- Improve public transportation during the evenings and weekends

Other Ideas
- Improve lighting, security, and neighborhood patrols to prevent vandalism and crimes.
- Improve and expand the food bank
- Explore development of Bachelor's degrees at Blackfeet Community College
- Develop a technical/trade school for job training and subsequent employment
- Improve sidewalks, public safety, and roads
- Support small businesses
- Protect environment for younger generations
- Increase resources for pregnant teens, housing, education, police, and job training
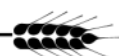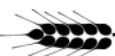
Hill County Community Input
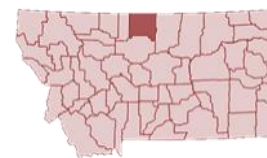
Economic Development (private business)
- Increase education opportunities (MSUN, Havre Job Service)
- Nurture farmers markets, co-ops, etc.
- Develop low-cost health care options
- Open Canadian port, improve roads, create housing
- Utilize old IGA building

Education
- Explore new funding sources, perhaps through expanded development of natural resources
- Increase representation on Board of Regents
- Increase local control over schools, reduce federal and state control
- Create counseling program for bullying prevention
- Serve healthy foods in cafeterias, increase students' physical activity

Employment
- Increase opportunities for vocational training
- Engage youth as part of community
- Invest in industrial employers to remain in community long term
- Continue to offer transit, university-level technical training
- Develop more diverse opportunities (e.g. arts organization, non-industrial employers)
- Use spaces that have been vacated to house new craft shops; senior living; manufacturing.
- Develop ag-related manufacturing
- Apply for Incumbent Workers Training Program grants from Montana DOLI

Energy
- Expand home weatherization program
- Encourage dialogue concerning energy sources and development of alternative fuels (wind, solar, biofuels)
- Coordinate development with MSUN research
- Reduce government mandates
- Complete feasibility study for small scale wind farms and solar power
- Hard-wire street lights for dependable service in winter
- Educate consumers on benefits of improved energy efficiency
- Explore benefits of all renewable energy resources
- Increase availability of Low-Income Energy Assistance Programs (LIEAP) to last through winter
- Develop renewable energy to lower energy costs and create jobs

Environment
- Acquire pulverizer for recycling local glass
- Create incentives for recycling
- Organize additional community cleanups
- Develop fur trading services
- Seek greater local autonomy
- Enact a law against littering on the reservation

Parks & Recreation
- Create more walking trails and recreational opportunities
- Develop a park for younger kids
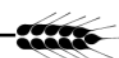
Hill County (Continued)

Health

- Attract new local health care providers, including specialists
- Develop health care options separate from existing local "monopolies"
- Reduce turnover of doctors
- Reduce health insurance charges
- Focus on prevention (diet and exercise)
- Provide weekly transportation to health services
- Provide transportation from Chester to Havre
- Collaborate with home health care providers for transportation
- Recruit local doctors
- Expand current farmer's markets and join Food Hub to improve fresh foods access
- Improve eating habits and make exercise a family affair
- Educate 911 dispatchers on Northcentral Montana geography and improve mapping of area
- Improve health care options specifically in dentistry and optometry

Housing

- Locate housing developer and offer tax credits
- Develop more middle- and low-income housing options
- Refurbish old houses
- Explore opportunities through Habitat for Humanity
- Build more affordable housing, especially for young families and single people
- Increase Section 8 housing
- Reduce rents for non-Section 8 housing
- Assist the housing department with costs in maintaining homes

Transportation

- Increase public transportation in city
- Increase use of bus line North Central Montana Transit
- Increase service and reduce prices for air flights
- Improve transportation for workers

Other Ideas

- Sponsor alcohol-free events
- Encourage more collaboration among community non-profits, pool resources and promote efforts such as Vibrant Futures
- Develop "farm the boulevard" program, a living pantry, and hydroponic garden
- Develop and outdoor water park
- Consolidate city/county governments and introduce non-partisan elections
- Invest in value-added agriculture and natural resource development
- Improve awareness of estate planning and Havre Community Foundation
- Promote MSUN, Boys' & Girls' Club, and afterschool activities
- Develop city infrastructure including city sewers and curbside recycling
- Use the vacant Kremlin school for a care center
- Promote the area
- Address concerns for culture and traditions from Native Americans at elementary schools
- Reduce racial discrimination in neighboring towns

Judith Basin County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Keep taxes low enough to promote new businesses
- Ensure dependable cell phone service
- Expand hours of grocery store
- Develop credit card gas station (rather than key)
- Reopen Black Bull (access building and liquor license)
- Recruit bookkeeper/accountant
- Locate lenders who can help make borrowing easier
- Develop tourism
- Improve internet connectivity
- Identify regulations that are holding business back
- Establish new restaurant

Employment

- Develop jobs in energy to bring more workers to area
- Develop jobs in oil, coal, agriculture, finance, manufacturing, housing, and retail
- Identify government policies that harm local businesses
- Improve internet access
- Attract young people through employment opportunities and housing
- Maintain Forest Service jobs

Health

- Provide education about healthy diet
- Establish health facilities closer to town
- Access community wellness program
- Maintain healthy lifestyle

Housing

- Coordinate with other communities to rehab housing
- Seek grants for multi-family housing projects
- Secure assisted living facility for seniors

Transportation

- Provide transportation to health services
- Install signal arms, warning signal on all railroad crossings
- Establish gas station
- Reinstate train service to create opportunity for tourist and recreational rides, sight-seeing by train
- Develop public transportation between Lewistown and Great Falls, possible senior bus
- Secure low-cost transit for seniors needing to travel to medical appointments
- Seek grants to build or repair side streets and sidewalks
- Build walking and hiking trails, bike paths
- Coordinate ride-share to medical appointments
- Coordinate prescription pick-up
- Provide low cost vehicle rentals for individuals without reliable transportation
- Develop a community bulletin board
- Create place mats or printed community calendar (use high school)

Parks & Recreation

- Install hook-ups for temporary campers
- Establish location for community activities (weddings, funerals, parties, etc.)
- Seek hotel/motel; indoor exercise facility
- More CPM trails in Belt Mountains
- Improve pool

Education

- Create student activity center
- Offer adult education/employment & business training
- Integrate individual sports into school athletic program
- Expand library
- Create volunteer corps

Liberty County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)
- Encourage development of new Main Street businesses (restaurant, motel, tire repair services)
- Increase access to affordable business financing
- Develop and industrial parking

Employment
- Improve infrastructure to capture and sell wind energy
- Increase affordable housing to attract new residents
- Develop communication between employers and workforce

Health
- Encourage improvements in Medicare payments
- Limit liability to reduce cost of insurance
- Provide local training for health care professionals
- Encourage additional medical personnel such as chiropractors to establish business

Housing
- Seek financing for demolition of "eyesore" housing
- Seek financial group to invest in new housing
- Create more affordable low-income housing

Infrastructure
- Prepare for the expansion of Bakken activity, the potential "boom"
- Increase police force
- Improve the jail
- Improve sewer system
- Build sidewalks

Parks & Recreation
- Pave roads to Lake Elwell

Other Ideas
- Seek ways to encourage youth to remain in the area such as summer youth activities and job opportunities
- Build capacity to care for elders
- Market vacant lots to people from outside the area
- Market slower pace of life to people from outside the area
- Market tourist opportunities

Phillips County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Develop housing
- Attract new businesses, industry
- Continue revitalization of downtown area
- Continue to fund Phillco
- Develop call center
- Establish community center
- Improved use of existing buildings; recruit new businesses
- Create business directory
- Develop "Welcome" packet for tourists and new residents
- Recruit optometrist, dentist
- Encourage young families to move to the area
- Offer employee training in customer service
- Increase public transportation (community bus; part-time driver; weekly route to Malta)
- Establish public restrooms
- Develop a public park
- Establish local grocery store
- Develop farm-to-cafeteria program to improve access to fresh foods
- Encourage development of a restaurant that serves regular meals
- Attract traveling doctor/nurse to work with Phillips County Hospital
- Promote recreational opportunities (landscape & wildlife, ATV trails, campgrounds, hunting and fishing)
- Support hunting and tourism (mapping, maintenance, trail safety)
- Develop year-round employment options
- Develop housing (limited by public lands surrounding town)

Housing

- Develop new rentals (multi-family, low income affordable)
- Seek grants for home ownership
- Clear some old, unused housing to make lots available for building
- Encourage development of new housing and subdivision
- Encourage housing rehabilitation through demonstration grant
- Host rental information session for potential landlords
- Offer local tax incentives to remove old structures and replace with new housing
- Encourage private development
- Convert old hospital into 2-4 bedroom units
- Create more rentals
- Increase affordable housing
- Build energy efficient housing
- Retrofit current housing for energy efficiency
- Seek grants to develop needed housing options including energy efficiency, larger homes, and apartments
- Examine limitations of housing development due to public lands, flood plain
- Establish weatherization program
- Develop retrofit program to improve energy efficiency
- Develop new rentals

Infrastructure

- Build tax base by attracting new residents
- Recruit volunteers for fire department
- Improve road maintenance (gravel, paving)
- Encourage use of bus
- Replace water system
- Increase cell phone and Internet service
- Expand Highway 2 to four lanes
- Attract employers
- Develop smart communities

- Create office space to rent
- Provide drinking water to all households
- Improve sewer system (especially for cold weather)
- Even the road grade where it crosses culvert
- Install restrooms at track field
- Encourage BLM to improve fire access, signage, and gates
- Improve maintenance of local roads (gravel, paving)
- Improve sewer system (now all septic tanks)
- Attract younger firefighters

Parks & Recreation

- Market hunting/fishing for tourism
- Develop gas station, convenience store, museum, restaurant
- Develop community recreation center
- Build partnerships and volunteerism
- Create water park
- Provide bowling facility
- Promote and market city of Malta
- Promote areas like Zortman
- Use pamphlets and informational documents to promote area
- Support tourism by developing services such as lodging, restaurant, gas station, public restrooms, public access park, signs
- Develop golf course, bowling alley, community center, weight room, etc.
- Establish 4th of July Celebration, ATV trails, horseback riding, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing
- Develop trail and road maintenance, ambulance service, law enforcement
- Support signs, trail maintenance, safety brochures, maps, history kiosks
- Develop recreational access to Azure cave

Employment

- Encourage small businesses
- Reduce regulation

- Allow the TransCanada project
- Provide employee training
- Encourage new companies to create more jobs
- Improve government policy in regards to agriculture, mining
- Maintain mine reclamation
- Encourage use of some state lands for recreational access and housing development
- Develop access road

Energy

- Develop housing/services to retain gas employees

Health

- Improve access to specialized services
- Establish hospice care
- Assist elders to manage medical appointments

Transportation

- Improve Highway 2 to accommodate increased east-west traffic (Bakken) – "4 for 2"
- Seek north-south public transportation to increase resident access to medical appointments in Great Falls
- Reduce regulations that inhibit private enterprise

Other Ideas

- Increase community involvement
- Encourage young people to remain or return to local businesses
- House all emergency vehicles in one location
- Reduce Fish and Game, DEQ, EPA regulations

Pondera County Community Input

Economic Development (private business)

- Increase grocery stores and gas stations
- Establish restaurants
- Increase stores, competition

Employment

- Improve environments for teachers
- Improve training for public servants
- Increase jobs to encourage residents to remain

Energy

- Explore new energy options such as wind power
- Improve energy infrastructure

Environment

- Clean environmental area

Education

- Increase educational funding in science and art programs
- Improve class options, recruit experienced teachers, provide college credits

Health

- Improve availability and quality of local medical care
- Reduce costs of specialized healthcare
- Improve access to emergency health care
- Increase medical supplies

Housing

- Create more low-income housing
- Reduce housing costs
- Maintain affordable housing during potential "boom" cycles
- Improve housing options and availability
- Renovate old, unsafe houses

Recreation & Parks

- Establish a dog park community and social activities
- Increase recreational opportunities for children and families, particularly after school
- Develop youth and family entertainment other than just the theater and museum
- Encourage new buildings and new activity centers to improve look of town

Transportation

- Improve street conditions
- Improve snow removal so driveways aren't plowed in

Other Ideas

- Establish another Head Start program
- Increase local healthy food choices
- Encourage healthy restaurants
- Urge youth involvement in community
- Reduce bars
- Increase social events for students
- Improve law enforcement
- Increase community involvement/interaction
- Develop local activities for adults and children, such as pool, basketball court, weight/exercise room
- Increase support for food pantry during holiday season
- Repair broken sidewalks
- Improve infrastructure and revitalize buildings

Rocky Boy's Reservation Community Input

Economic Development (private business)
- Establish locally-grown food distribution system
- Promote self-sustaining tribal departments
- Increase the number of Indian businesses (grocery store, gas station)
- Establish stores and shopping centers closer to Rocky Boy or Box Elder
- Establish local electricity/gas/phone companies
- Increase honest, respected leadership

Education
- Develop immersion education for all grades
- Establish Stone Child College as a four-year institution
- Establish cultural centers, museums, art galleries
- Explore possibilities for a centrally-located Boys and Girls Club
- Increase the variety of educational programs offered at Stone Child College
- Increase school retention rates
- Provide cultural workshops through grade schools and college

Employment
- Increase job opportunities
- Develop additional job training for low-income individuals

Energy
- Establish energy efficient homes and apartments
- Develop renewable energy
- Explore free heating for homes
- Establish local energy distribution for electricity and gas
- Establish 100% renewable energy resources for local use and businesses
- Reduce energy costs
- Increase LIEAP allocation

Environment
- Increase security in villages
- Develop healthy water system
- Create more gardens and increase access to fresh foods
- Generate more donations to the Food Bank
- Reduce the amount of litter by enacting laws

Recreation & Parks
- Establish more hiking and biking trails
- Create more parks, including skate parks, tennis courts, and other ball courts

Health
- Reduce presence and use of meth and other drugs
- Improve health care, establish specialists (dental, optometry, etc.)
- Increase access to medical and vital medical services
- Reduce racial discrimination in neighboring towns

Housing
- Increase affordable rental housing
- Increase availability and variety of housing (apartments, houses, Section 8 housing, etc.)
- Build more homes
- Improve home maintenance methods and regulations

Transportation
- Add buses
- Operate free public transportation with frequent stops

Teton County Community Input

Employment
- Improve wages—food and housing costs are too high for the amount of money that can be made working here
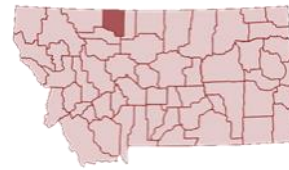
Housing
- Increase rentals and housing
- Develop reasonably priced, updated housing
- Improve low income housing

Other Ideas
- Preserve local way of life
- Encourage establishment of additional grocery store

Toole County Community Input

Environment
- Promote recycling and preservation
- Monitor DEQ water quality requirements

Housing
- Construct more affordable housing
- Build more low-income homes for purchase
- Provide low interest loans or grants for home renovation

Recreation & Parks
- Create more parks for soccer & basketball

Transportation
- Develop plan for bike traffic on Main Street
- Establish a hub-to-hub bus center (public transit)
- Build an additional viaduct for overhead train crossing
- Create more senior citizen transportation

Other Ideas
- Place lifeguards at the swimming pool

Appendix C
Community Engagement Methods

The *Vibrant Futures* (VF) Regional Plan relied heavily on input from officials and residents of many diverse communities. Our investment in public input ensured that the plan highlights previously underrepresented needs and assets of rural and tribal residents. It also helped us document the many ways in which our small satellite communities and larger hub cities are linked economically.

Community Roundtables. From August through December 2012, we convened 21 Community Roundtable meetings to discuss community needs, priorities, and visions of their best futures. For each meeting, VF compiled preliminary demographic, economic and housing data. Chippewa-Cree Tribal Planning & Development Department at Rocky Boy's Reservation convened two additional meetings. Community Roundtable meetings totaled 288 participants.

Focus Groups. Nine focus groups were held for 174 participants in the five counties that had already hosted CED planning meetings in 2012. Focus groups focused on elderly, youth, low-income, reservation, and extreme rural residents.

Scenario Workshops. These were held over a two-week period in March 2013. Locations were dispersed throughout the region and were accessible to rural and tribal communities. Participants (88) included community leaders, non-profit staff, elected officials, government planners, and interested residents. Participants discussed effective regional planning and improved sustainability elements for local CEDs and Growth Plans.

Resident Surveys. Resident feedback was supplemented by 347 surveys completed at community roundtables and focus groups; 58 additional surveys were completed online for a total of 405 surveys.
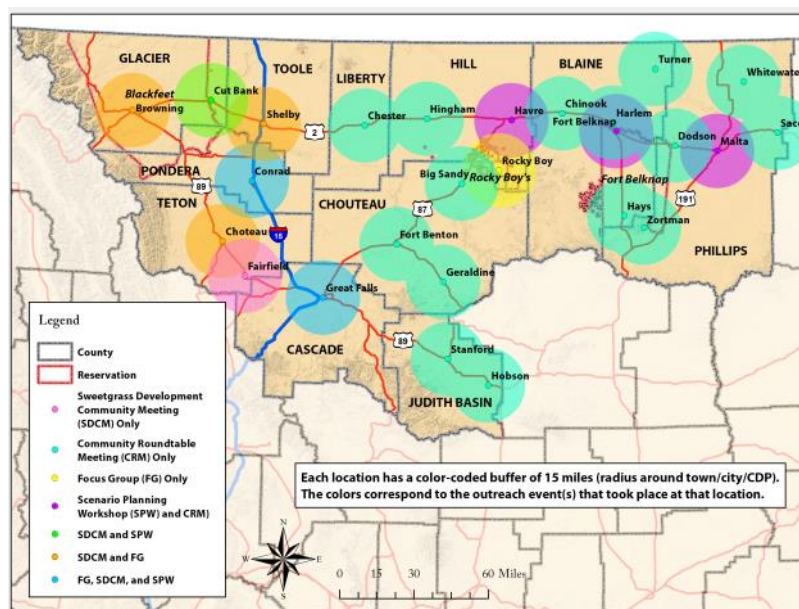
Survey Responses

The following questions were answered by 427 respondents and the results are shown below

- In addition to the list in the previous question, what other developments will be important to your community over the next 20 years?

- What local changes would improve the quality of life in your community over the next 20 years?

- What do you like about your community right now?

Category	Words or Phrases	# of Times Cited
Economic Development	Jobs, employment, work, employment, economy, economic	285
Education	Education, School, College	218
Housing	Housing, House, apartment, rental	202
Commercial Services	Gas Station, store, food, grocery, restaurant	113
Parks & Recreation	Park, recreation, sports, play, playground	113
Community Character	Small town, friendly, nice town, nice people, beautiful place, quite, sense of community, good neighbors	95
Youth & Families	Youth, young, family, teen	60
Infrastructure (non-transportation)	Water, drinking water, utilities, infrastructure, drainage	60
Transportation	Transportation, roads, streets, transit	56
Public Safety	Safety, police, fire, crime, law enforcement	55
Medical Services	Medical, clinic, hospital, health care, Dental/Dentist	53
Environment	Environment, open space, clean air, preserve public lands, recycle, green	52
Culture & Arts	Culture, arts, events, museum, community activity, community center	47
Services (non-medical)	Local services, vital services, city services, government services, public services, social services, senior services	44
Community revitalization	Clean-up, old buildings, litter, trash, junk, run-down, renovate, need beautification, need community pride	38
Energy Development	Energy - (Specifically mentioned: Wind, oil, natural gas, renewable, solar, alternative, biofuel)	37
Non-motorized transportation	Sidewalk, trail, bike path	20

COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLES

Date	County or Reservation	Location	Participants
08.29.12	Rocky Boy's Reservation	Rocky Boy Agency	18
08.30.12	Rocky Boy's Reservation	Rocky Boy Agency	12
09.20.12	Hill County	Havre HRDC	15
10.04.12	Fort Belknap Reservation	Fort Belknap Agency	12
10.04.12	Fort Belknap Reservation	Hays-Lodge Pole	14
10.09.12	Chouteau County	Big Sandy	20
10.09.12	Chouteau County	Fort Benton	12
10.11.12	Blaine County	Chinook	8
10.16.12	Liberty County	Chester	9
10.16.12	Blaine County	Harlem	6
10.17.12	Phillips County	Saco	12
10.23.12	Chouteau County	Geraldine	7
10.25.12	Hill County	Havre	33
10.30.12	Phillips County	Whitewater	6
10.30.12	Phillips County	Zortman	10
11.15.12	Phillips County	Dodson	16
11.15.12	Hill County	Kremlin-Gildford	8
11.28.12	Phillips County	Malta	8
12.12.12	Judith Basin County	Hobson	13
12.12.12	Judith Basin County	Stanford	4
12.21.12	Hill County	Havre HRDC	23
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS			**266**

FOCUS GROUPS

Date	County or Reservation	Location	Participants
01.23.13	Rocky Boy's Reservation	Rocky Boy Job Training	29
01.23.13	Rocky Boy's Reservation	Stone Child College	12
01.23.13	Toole County	Shelby Senior Housing Facility	13
02.01.13	Pondera County	Conrad Food Pantry	22
02.01.13	Pondera County	Conrad High School	17
02.08.13	Blackfeet Reservation	Blackfeet Community College	23
02.08.13	Blackfeet Reservation	Browning High School	12
02.10.13	Blaine County	Turner	38
02.21.13	Teton County	Chouteau Head Start	8
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS			**174**

SCENARIO WORKSHOPS

Date	County or Reservation	Location	Participants
03.13.13	Glacier County	Cut Bank	13
03.14.13	Pondera County	Conrad	10
03.15.13	Cascade County	Great Falls	26
03.18.13	Hill County	Havre	20
03.19.13	Fort Belknap Reservation	Fort Belknap Agency	12
03.20.13	Phillips County	Malta	7
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS			**88**

Appendix D
Policy Priority Analysis

We assessed all community input to prioritize the needs, benefits, and actions that were most highly valued by residents. This feedback came from resident meetings, working groups, scenario-planning workshops, and Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

Roundtable & Scenario Planning Workshop – Policy Analysis

Policy Topic	Roundtables	Scenario Plan	Focus Groups	Total
Housing (Combined)	62	38	83	183
Jobs, Business Development, Workforce	33	31	72	136
Trails, Parks & Recreation facilities	29	18	34	81
Housing – New development	24	18	39	81
Education	13	13	47	73
Medical facilities & services	19	19	31	69
Local Commercial Services (Grocery stores, Gas stations)	14	12	25	51
Transit	28	4	13	45
Tourism & Promotion	20	16	6	42
Affordable Housing	11	4	27	42
Renewable Energy (Wind, solar, biofuels)	18	12	10	40
Housing Rehab	16	7	15	38
Culture (Arts, museums, cultural activities)	3	29	4	36
Community Revitalization – Blight removal	9	9	17	35
Public Safety	18	2	13	33
Water & Sewer Infrastructure	17	5	9	31
Road – Street network	16	6	9	31
Local foods	8	12	6	26
Recreation Center/Community Center	14	5	7	26
Downtown – Main Street Revitalization	9	14	2	25
Youth, Young families, attracting young professionals	12	1	12	25
Public Health, Fitness & Wellness	9	4	12	25
Partnerships/Non-Profit/Leadership	10	5	8	23
Energy Efficiency (Conservation, weatherization)	14	1	6	21
Senior housing	7	9	2	18
Broadband	10	6	1	17
Oil & Gas exploration	6	5	3	14
Small Town – Community Character	0	0	13	13
Rail	8	4	0	12
Recycling	6	3	2	11
Senior Services	4	1	6	11
Less government	7	0	3	10
Air	4	5	0	9
Industrial parks – industrial land development	1	7	0	8
Sidewalks – Trails	0	0	8	8
Fair Housing	4	0	2	6
Agriculture Development & Support	3	0	2	5
No Fracking	0	0	5	5

CEDS Policy Analysis

Theme	Policy	Bear Paw	Sweetwater	Blackfeet	Fort Belknap	Rocky Boy's
Regional Prosperity	Business - Job Growth	X	X	X	X	X
	Tourism	X	X	X		
	Work Force Training	X				
	Entrepreneurship	X	X			
	Downtown/Main Street		X			
	Broadband/Internet		X			
	Renewable Energy	X	X		X	X
	Oil & Gas		X		X	
Community Vitality	New Housing Development	X		X	X	
	Affordable Housing	X	X	X	X	
	Housing Rehabilitation			X	X	
	Senior Housing	X	X	X		
	Fair Housing			X		
	Energy Efficiency					
	Parks, Trails & Recreation	X	X	X	X	
	Cultural Heritage		X			X
	Healthy neighborhoods			X		
	Commercial Services					
Physical Systems	Road Network	X		X	X	
	Transit			X		
	Sidewalks and Trails	X		X		
	Affordable Transportation					
	Drinking Water	X	X		X	X
	Wastewater upgrades	X	X		X	X
	Financing Infrastructure	X			X	
Social Systems	Aging Services				X	X
	Local Government Services	X			X	
	Education	X			X	
	Health Care	X	X			X
	Public health & wellness		X		X	
	Local Foods	X			X	
	Youth & Families				X	X
Natural Assets	Efficient Land Use Patterns	X	X			
	Integrated Water Management	X	X			
	Sustainable Agriculture	X				
	Land Stewardship				X	

Policy Analysis

Theme	Policy	Community Roundtable	Scenario Workshops	Growth Policy Review	Sweetwater CEDS	U.S. HUD	Catalytic Groups	Expert Groups	Community Venture
Regional Prosperity	Business - Job Growth	x	x	x	x	x			x
	Tourism	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
	Work Force Training	x				x	x		x
	Entrepreneurship			x	x				x
	Downtown/Main Street	x	x	x	x				x
	Broadband/Internet	x		x	x		x	x	x
	Renewable Energy	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
	Oil & Gas				x		x	x	
Community Vitality	New Housing Development	x	x					x	x
	Affordable Housing	x		x	x	x		x	x
	Housing Rehabilitation	x			x			x	x
	Senior Housing				x	x	x	x	
	Fair Housing					x			x
	Energy Efficiency			x		x		x	
	Parks, Trails & Recreation	x	x	x	x	x		x	
	Cultural Heritage		x	x	x				x
	Healthy neighborhoods	x		x		x			
	Commercial Services	x	x						
Physical Systems	Road Network	x		x		x	x	x	
	Transit	x				x	x		x
	Walkability	x	x	x		x		x	
	Affordable Transportation	x					x		x
	Drinking Water	x			x	x	x	x	
	Wastewater upgrades	x			x	x	x	x	
	Financing Infrastructure			x		x	x		
Social Systems	Aging Services			x	x				
	Local Government Services	x	x	x	x			x	
	Education	x	x						x
	Health Care	x	x		x		x	x	x
	Public Health & Wellness	x				x	x	x	x
	Local Foods		x			x		x	
	Youth & Families	x			x				x
Natural Assets	Efficient Land Use Patterns			x		x			
	Integrated Water Management			x		x		x	
	Sustainable Agriculture			x	x		x	x	
	Land Stewardship			x	x		x		x

Appendix E
Distance-to-Services Maps

These maps were developed from a Vibrant Futures survey distributed at the beginning of the planning process and completed by over 400 residents. Respondents identified their hometown and where they traveled for various services such as school, grocery shopping, recreation, and medical appointments.
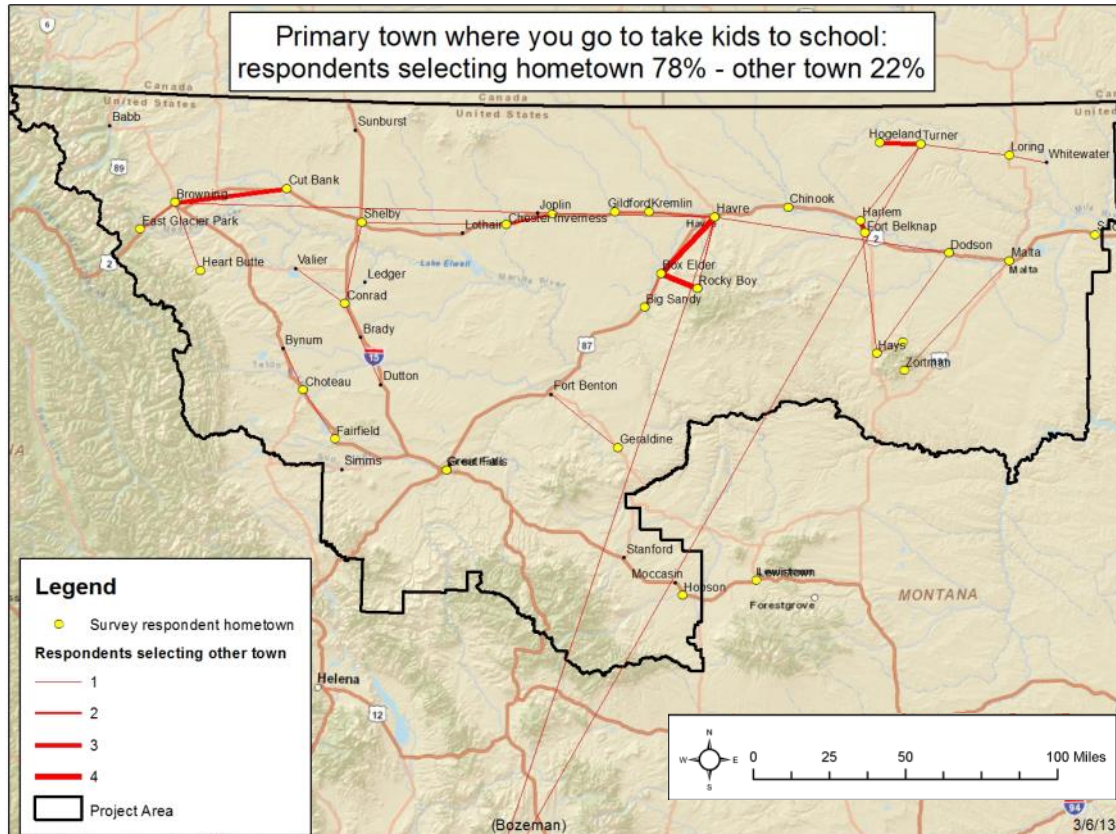
Survey responses were coded and compiled. Here each line represents the relative number of residents traveling from home to other locations for services. Thicker lines indicate more people traveling between communities. These maps illustrate the lengthy distances separating rural residents from basic services, as well as the extensive transportation-based social and economic networks linking the region.

Downloadable maps are available by clicking on each map.

Primary town where you go to shop for fresh food:
respondents selecting hometown 59% - other town 41%

Legend

Survey respondent hometown
Respondents selecting other town
1
2
3 - 4
5 - 13
Project Area

Primary town where you go to shop for groceries:
respondents selecting hometown 67% - other town 33%

Legend

Survey respondent hometown
Respondents selecting other town
1
2
3
4 - 9
Project Area

Primary town where you go to work:
respondents selecting hometown 77% - other town 23%

Legend
○ Survey respondent hometown
Respondents selecting other town
— 1
— 2
— 3 - 4
— 5 - 10
☐ Project Area

3/6/13

Primary town where you go for education and training:
respondents selecting hometown 62% - other town 38%

Legend
○ Survey respondent hometown
Respondents selecting other town
— 1
— 2
— 3 - 4
— 5 - 9
☐ Project area

3/6/13

Primary town where you go to take kids to school: respondents selecting hometown 78% - other town 22%

Primary town where you go for daily or weekly recreation and exercise, or the nearest town to the location: respondents selecting hometown 64% - other town 36%

Primary town where you go for emergency medical services: respondents selecting hometown 50% - other town 50%

Primary town where you go for specialist medical services: respondents selecting hometown 15% - other town 85%

Primary town where you go for fuel or automotive services: respondents selecting hometown 70% - other town 30%

Primary town where you go to shop for other household goods and services: respondents selecting hometown 51% - other town 49%

Primary town where you go out to eat:
respondents selecting hometown 60% - other town 40%

Legend

○ Survey respondent hometown

Respondents selecting other town

— 1

— 2 - 3

— 4 - 5

— 6 - 11

☐ Project Area

0   25   50   100 Miles

3/6/13

Appendix F
Community Population Pyramids

Population pyramids show the number of males and females, by age groups, who live in a community at a given moment. These diagrams allow us to easily compare demographic differences between metropolitan areas, rural towns, and reservations. They illustrate the tendency of big cities to have many residents of working age, while rural small towns have growing populations of elderly residents, and reservations have relatively more young children and youth. PDF document containing all population pyramids available on this thumb drive.

United States, 2010
Total population 308,745, 538

90 years and over	
80 to 84 years	
70 to 74 years	
60 to 64 years	
50 to 54 years	
40 to 44 years	
30 to 34 years	
20 to 24 years	
10 to 14 years	
Under 5 years	
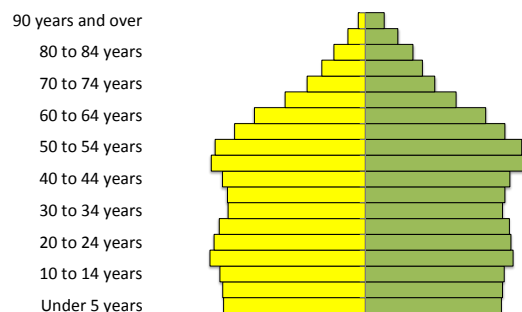
Montana, 2010
Total population 989, 415

90 years and over	
80 to 84 years	
70 to 74 years	
60 to 64 years	
50 to 54 years	
40 to 44 years	
30 to 34 years	
20 to 24 years	
10 to 14 years	
Under 5 years	
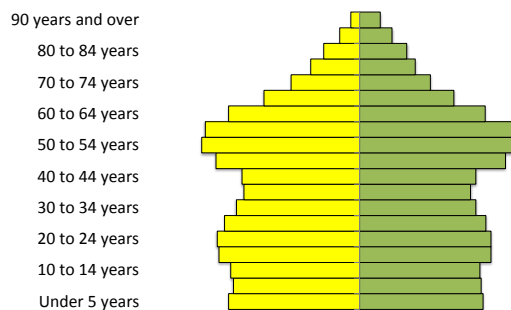
Blaine County

Chinook, 2010
Total population 1386
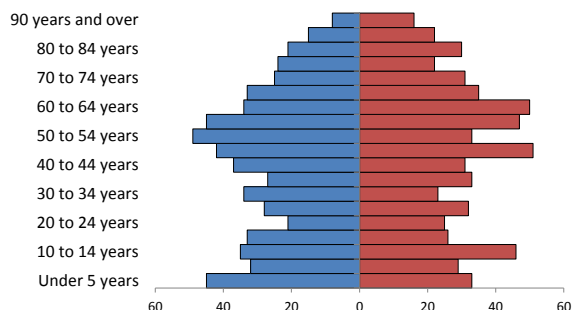
Harlem, 2010
Total population 808
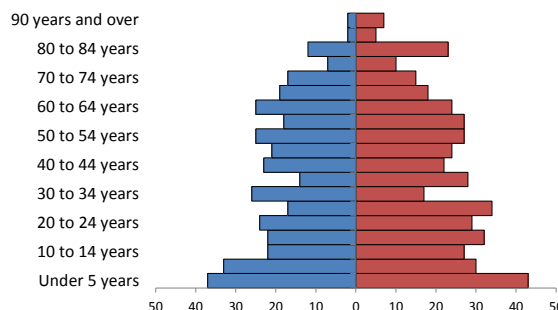
Blackfeet Reservation

Babb, 2010
Total population 174
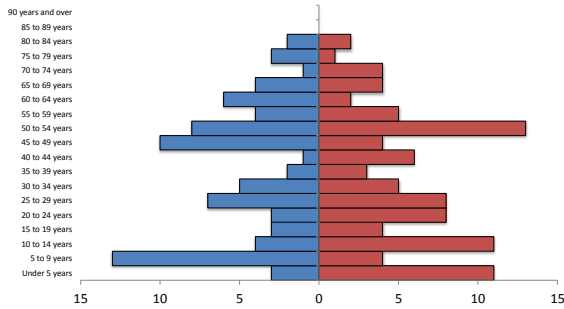
Browning, 2010
Total population 1016
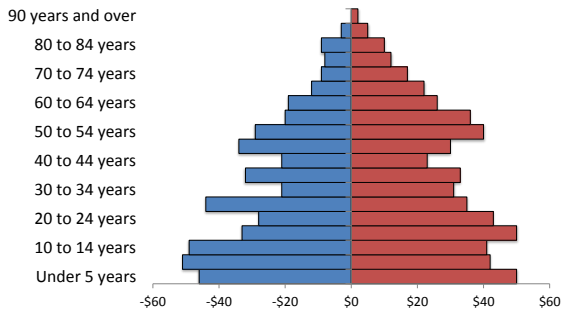
Heart Butte, 2010
Total population 582
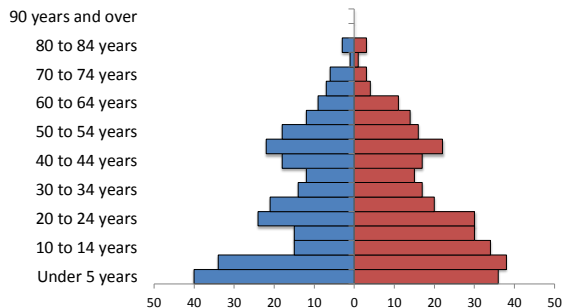
Cascade County

Great Falls, 2010
Total population 58505
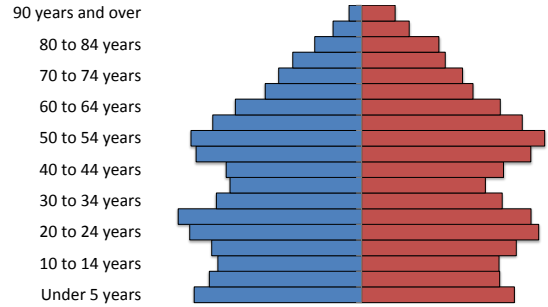
Belt, 2010
Total population 597
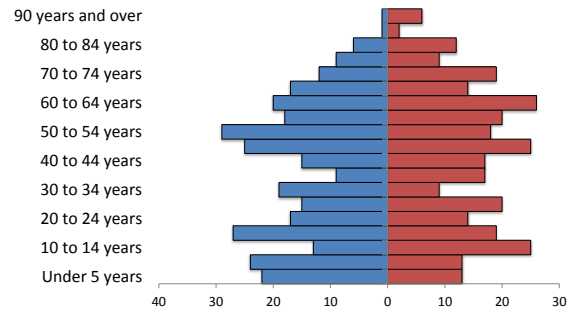
Vaughn, 2010
Total population 658
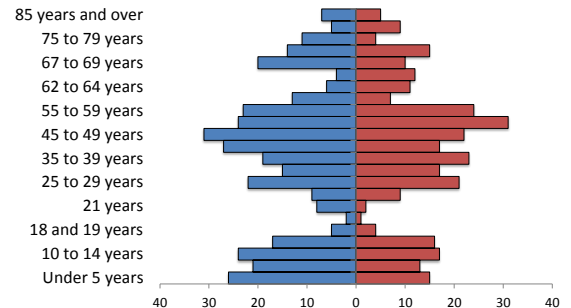
Chouteau County

Big Sandy, 2010
Total population 598
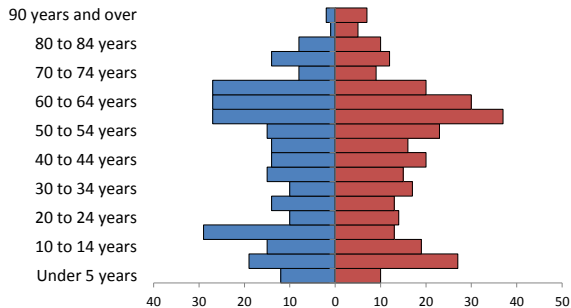
Boneau, 2010
Total population 380
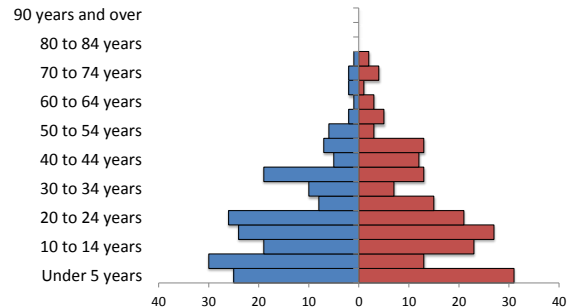
Geraldine, 2010
Total population 261
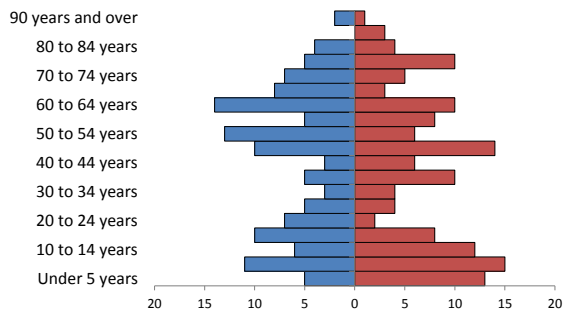
Fort Benton, 2010
Total population 1,464
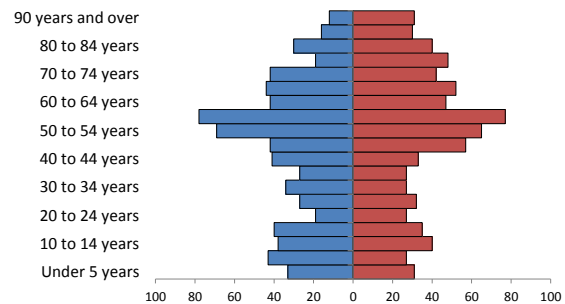
Fort Belknap Reservation

Fort Belknap Agency, 2010
Total population 1,293
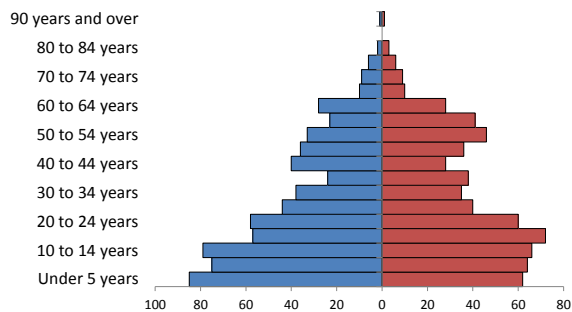
Hays-Lodge Pole, 2010
Total population 1100
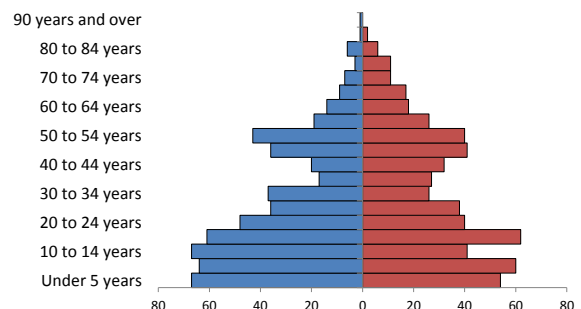
Glacier County

Cut Bank, 2010
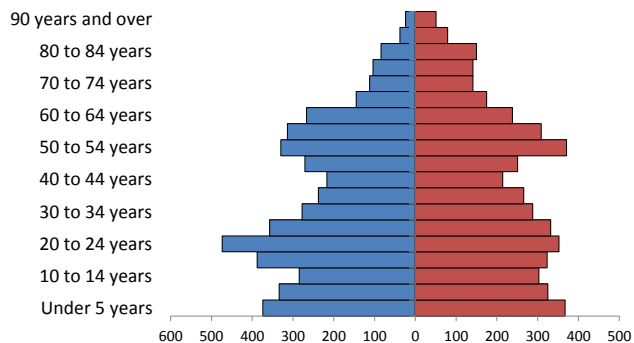Total population 2869
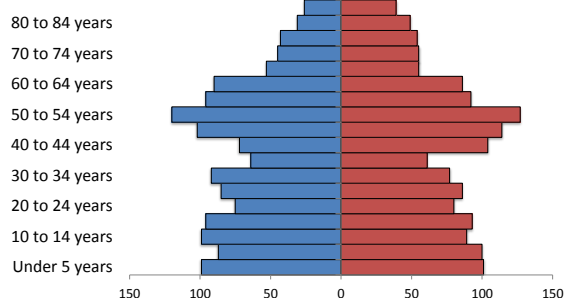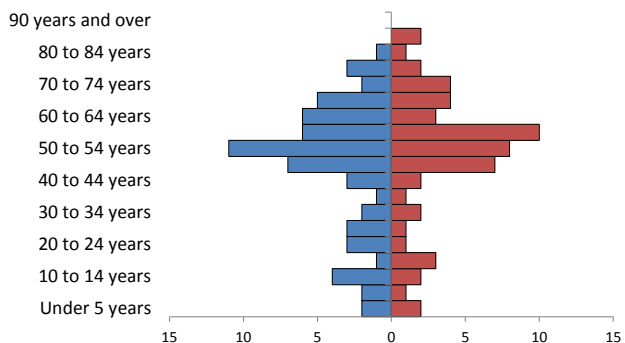

East Glacier, 2010
Total population 363
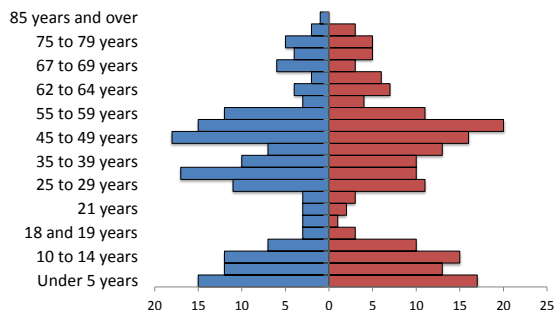
Hill County

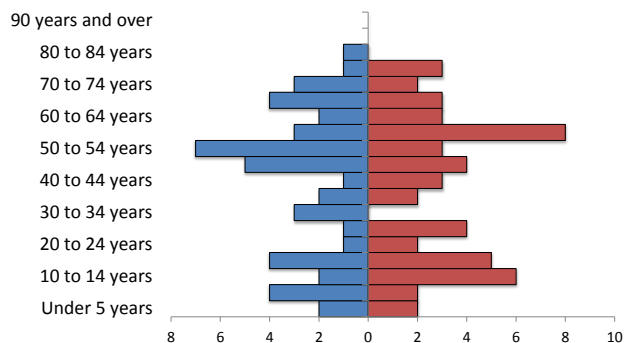## Gildford, 2010
Total population 179
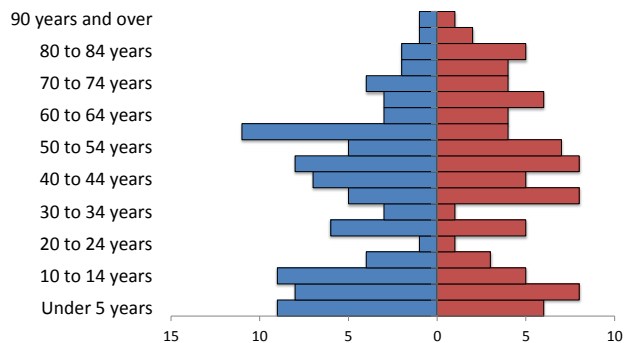
Havre, 2010
Total population 9310
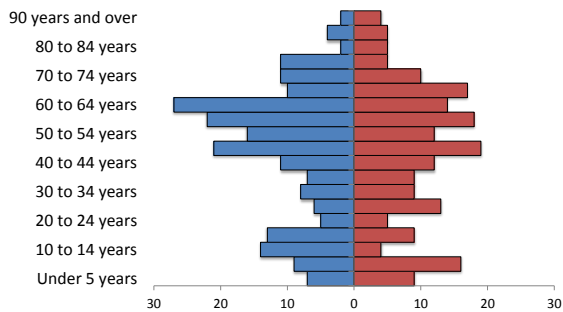

Hingham, 2010
Total population 118

Kremlin, 2010
Total population 98
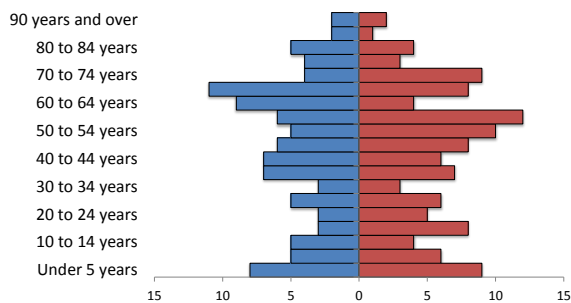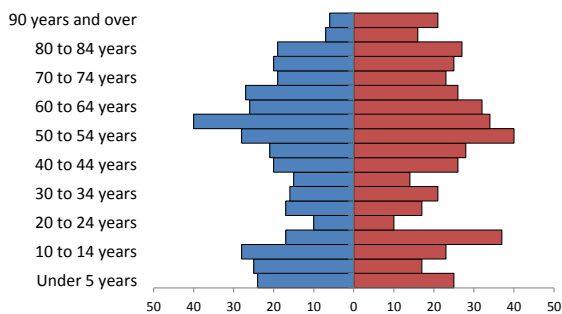
Judith Basin County

Stanford, 2010
Total population 401

Hobson, 2010
Total population 215

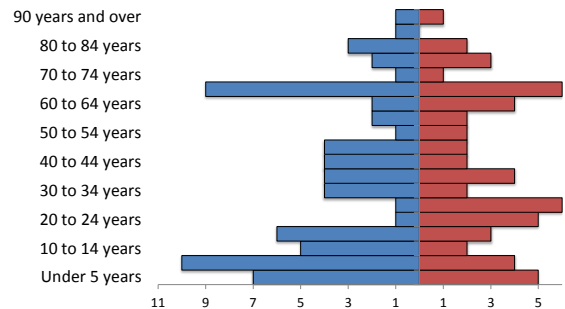## Phillips County

Dodson, 2010
Total population 124

Malta, 2010
Total population 1997

Liberty County

Chester, 2010
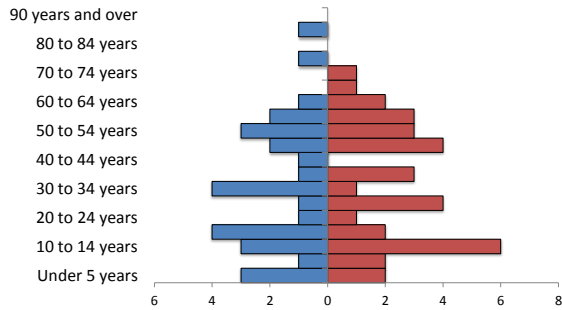Total population 847
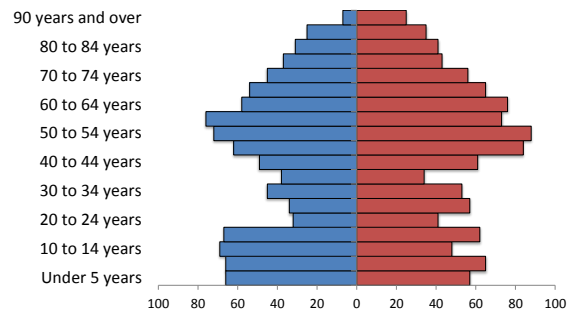
Saco, 2010
Total population 197
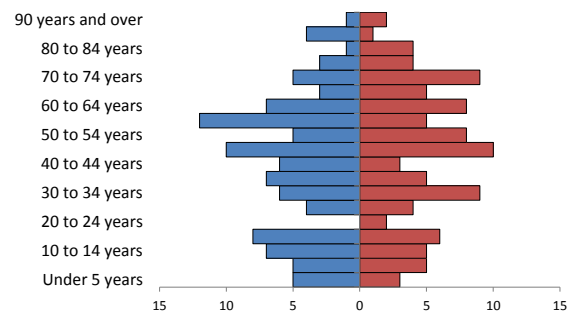
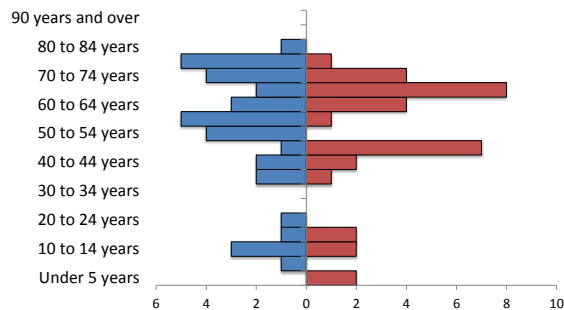## Phillips County (Continued)

Whitewater, 2010
Total population 64

Zortman, 2010
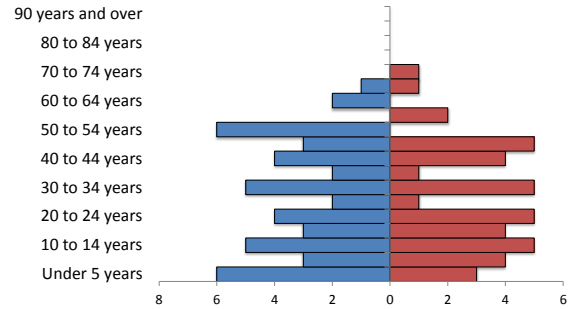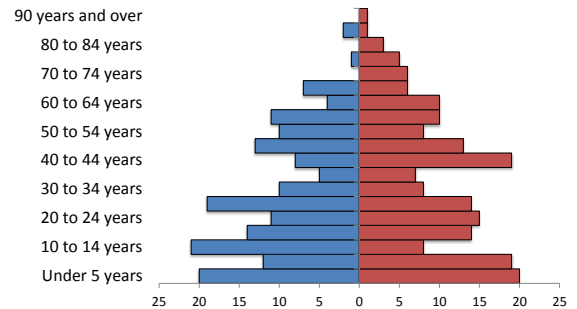Total population 69

Rocky Boy Reservation

Box Elder, 2010
Total population 87

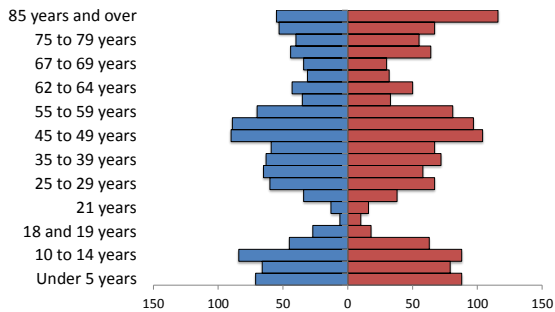### Rocky Boy Agency, 2010
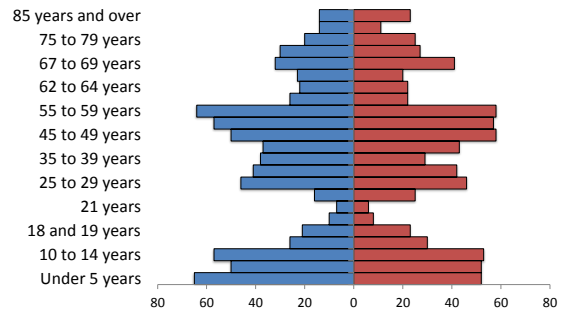Total population 355

Pondera County

Conrad, 2010
Total population 2570

Valier-Dupuyer, 2010
Total population 1539

Teton County

Choteau, 2010
Total population 1684

Age groups (top to bottom): 90 years and over, 80 to 84 years, 70 to 74 years, 60 to 64 years, 50 to 54 years, 40 to 44 years, 30 to 34 years, 20 to 24 years, 10 to 14 years, Under 5 years

X-axis: 80, 60, 40, 20, 0, 20, 40, 60, 80

Dutton, 2010
Total population 316

Age groups (top to bottom): 90 years and over, 80 to 84 years, 70 to 74 years, 60 to 64 years, 50 to 54 years, 40 to 44 years, 30 to 34 years, 20 to 24 years, 10 to 14 years, Under 5 years

X-axis: 20, 15, 10, 5, 0, 5, 10, 15, 20
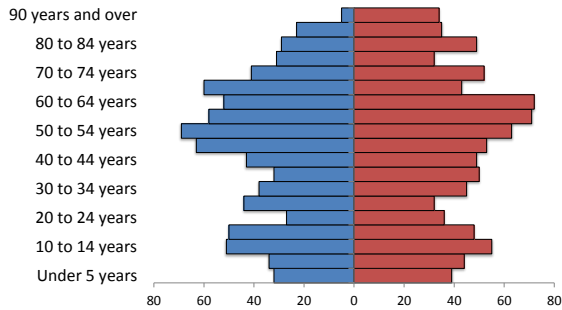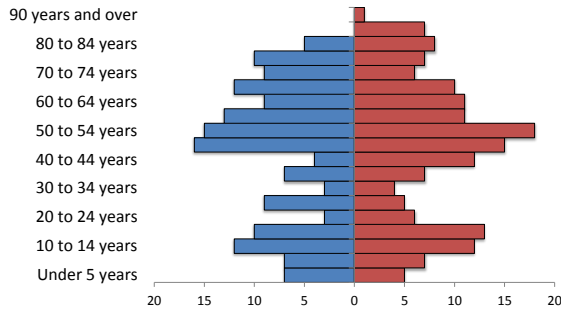
Fairfield, 2010
Total population 708

Age groups (top to bottom): 90 years and over, 80 to 84 years, 70 to 74 years, 60 to 64 years, 50 to 54 years, 40 to 44 years, 30 to 34 years, 20 to 24 years, 10 to 14 years, Under 5 years

X-axis: 40, 30, 20, 10, 0, 10, 20, 30, 40
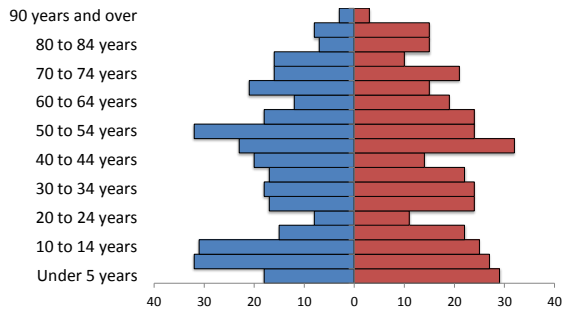
Toole County

Kevin, 2010
Total population 154

Age groups (top to bottom): 90 years and over, 80 to 84 years, 70 to 74 years, 60 to 64 years, 50 to 54 years, 40 to 44 years, 30 to 34 years, 20 to 24 years, 10 to 14 years, Under 5 years

X-axis: 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10
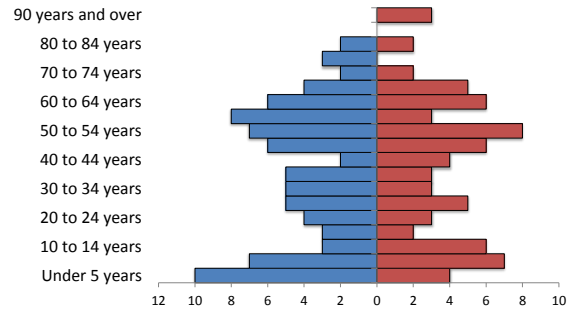
Shelby, 2010
Total population 3376

Age groups (top to bottom): 90 years and over, 80 to 84 years, 70 to 74 years, 60 to 64 years, 50 to 54 years, 40 to 44 years, 30 to 34 years, 20 to 24 years, 10 to 14 years, Under 5 years

X-axis: 250, 200, 150, 100, 50, 0, 50, 100, 150
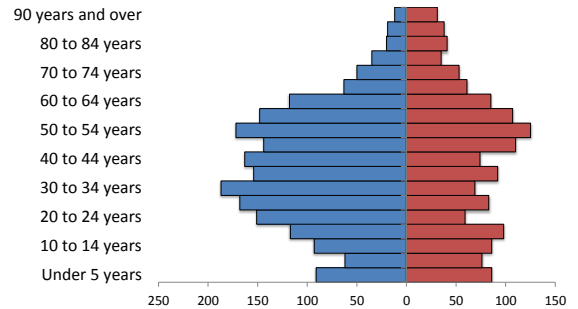
Sunburst, 2010
Total population 375

Age groups (top to bottom): 85 to 89 years, 75 to 79 years, 65 to 69 years, 55 to 59 years, 45 to 49 years, 35 to 39 years, 25 to 29 years, 15 to 19 years, 5 to 9 years

X-axis: 30, 20, 10, 0, 10, 20, 30
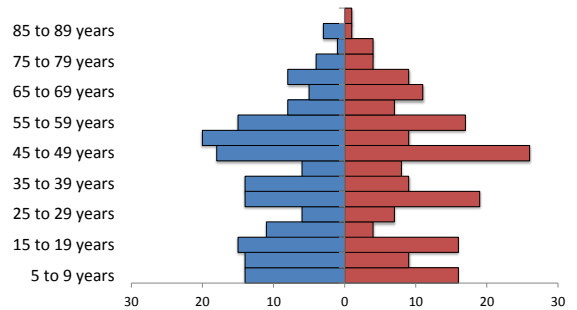
Appendix G
Baseline Indicator Data Tables

For every Regional Plan *Area of Focus*, we identified a handful of significant quantitative indicators from easily accessed commercial and government data sources. They are all available for counties; some are available for municipalities and reservations as well. These provide a starting point for measuring progress towards Regional Plan objectives over the next 20 years. Excel files of each data set are available by clicking the title.

Economic Development

- Employment Growth Over the Last Decade (2002 and 2012)
- Unemployment Trends (2000, 2010, and 2012)
- Gross Lodging Tax Revenue Trends (2000, 2010, 2013)
- Sector Employment Trends (2000, 2010, 2012)
- County Broadband Rankings (households with DL speed >25mbps)
- Renewable Energy Projects

Community Vitality

- Subsidized Housing Units by County and Reservation
- Owner-occupied and Renter-occupied Housing Unit Trends
- Housing Conditions
- Historic Places
- 2012 Loan Denial Rates for Montana and Northcentral Montana
- Total (Fall) Enrollments for Northcentral Montana Postsecondary Institutions

Transportation

- Total Crashes and Trends for Counties and Reservations within the Region
- Transit Ridership
- Individuals Driving to Work Alone

Social Systems

- Public Instruction Adequate Yearly Progress
- Licensed Adult Day Care Bed per Capita 65+
- Health Professional Shortage Areas
- Obesity Prevalence
- Health Status

Environment

- Water Bodies Covered by a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Plan
- Regional Watershed Groups
- Food Deserts
- County and Community Participation in the FEMA Community Rating System
- Source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2012
- Organic Farms and Sales in 2007 and 2012
- Value-Added Production and Sales

Appendix H
Mapped Data

Vibrant Futures drafted data maps to help our planners, grant writers, and funders visualize geographic distribution of the region's resources and areas of need. Over 60 maps of land-use, economic, and social data can be downloaded through the Vibrant Futures website (see list of mapped data in Appendix I, *Additional VF Online Resources*). The following pages contain a sampling of maps. Click here for additional maps available on this thumb drive.

2010 - 2013 FEMA Disaster Designations

Legend

Reservation

2013 Designated Area (DR-4127)
Public Assistance

2011 Designated Area (DR-1996)
Individual Assistance and Public Assistance
Public Assistance

2010 Designated Area (DR-1922)
Public Assistance

N   0   40   80   160 Miles

Unemployment Rate by Census Tract (2011)

Legend

Reservation
County

Unemployment Rate by Census Tract (CT No. in black)

Percent Unemployed (Pct in yellow)

- 0.000000000 - 0.700000000
- 0.700000001 - 2.50000000
- 2.50000001 - 4.70000000
- 4.70000001 - 7.90000000
- 7.90000001 - 14.9000000

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2007-2011)

N

0   37.5   75   150 Miles

Percent Not in Labor Force Aged 16 or Older by Census Tract (2011)

Legend

Reservation
County

Percent Not in Labor Force Aged 16 or Older by Census Tract

- 4.20000000 - 26.0000000
- 26.0000001 - 36.4000000
- 36.4000001 - 44.0000000
- 44.0000001 - 56.5000000
- 56.5000001 - 100.000000

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2007-2011)

N

0   37.5   75   150 Miles

2007-2011 5-Year Estimate: Household Median Income

Legend
Reservation
County
Household Median Income by Census Tract
(In 2011 Inflation-adjusted Dollars)
25712 - 33546
33546 - 43013
43013 - 55606
55606 - 83460
83460 - 117538

Source: 2007-2011 ACS 5-year Estimates

Poverty Rate by Census Tract (2011)

Legend
Reservation
County
Percent Living Below Poverty Level by Census Tract (CT No. in Black, Pov. Rate in Yellow)
1.700000 - 6.500000
6.500001 - 11.400000
11.400001 - 18.700000
18.700001 - 26.900000
26.900001 - 44.000000

Source: ACS 5-year estimates (2007-2011)

153

Accessible Airports and Train Stations

Glacier
Blackfeet
Toole
Liberty
Hill
Blaine
Phillips
Pondera
Rocky Boy's
Fort Belknap
Teton
Chouteau
Cascade
Judith Basin

Legend
Reservation
County
Airport
Amtrak Station
Incorporated Place
Census Designated Place
Railroad

N

0   40   80   160 Miles

Source: US Geological Survey and Montana Dept. of Administration/ITSD and Amtrak

Public Transit Routes

Sunburst
Glacier
Browning
Cut Bank
Toole
Shelby
Liberty
Chester
Hill
Havre
Fort Belknap
Harlem
Blaine
Blackfeet
Pondera
Conrad
Rocky Boy
Rocky Boy's
Fort Belknap
Phillips
Teton
Chouteau
Great Falls
Cascade
Judith Basin

Legend
City/Town
Reservation
County
Fort Belknap Transit Route
Glacier County Transit Route
North Central Montana Transit Route
Liberty County COA Route
Northern Transit Route
Rocky Boy's Transit Route
Toole County Transit Route

N

0   37.5   75   150 Miles

Source: Opportunity Link

2010 Male Life Expectancy by County

Glacier 72.9
Blackfeet
Toole 75.8
Liberty 75.8
Hill 75.8
Blaine 72.9
Rocky Boy's
Fort Belknap
Phillips 72.9
Pondera 72.9
Teton 72.9
Chouteau 72.9
Cascade 75.5
75.5 Judith Basin

Legend
Reservation
Male Life Expectancy (years)
72.9
75.5
75.8

N
0   37.5   75   150 Miles

Source: 2010 Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

2010 Female Life Expectancy by County

Glacier 79.6
Blackfeet
Toole 80.8
Liberty 80.8
Hill 80.8
Blaine 79.6
Rocky Boy's
Fort Belknap
80.4 Phillips
Pondera 79.6
Teton 79.6
Chouteau 79.6
Cascade 81.1
81.1 Judith Basin

Legend
Reservation
Female Life Expectancy (years)
79.6
80.4
80.8
81.1

N
0   37.5   75   150 Miles

Source: 2010 Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation

2004-2008 5-Year Average Infant Mortality by County

Source: Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, Office of Vital Statistics

Hospitals and Other Health Services

Source: Montana Department of Health and Human Services

2010 Adult Obesity Rates by County

Legend

Reservation

Percent Obese (estimate)

24.200000 - 25.500000

25.500001 - 27.100000

27.100001 - 28.700000

28.700001 - 29.100000

29.100001 - 33.500000

Source: Center for Disease Control, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Program (BRFSS)

2010 Adult Diagnosed Diabetes by County

Legend

Reservation

Percent Diagnosed Diabetes

7.800000

7.800001 - 8.500000

8.500001 - 9.000000

9.000001 - 9.800000

9.800001 - 12.800000

Source: Center for Disease Control, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Program (BRFSS)
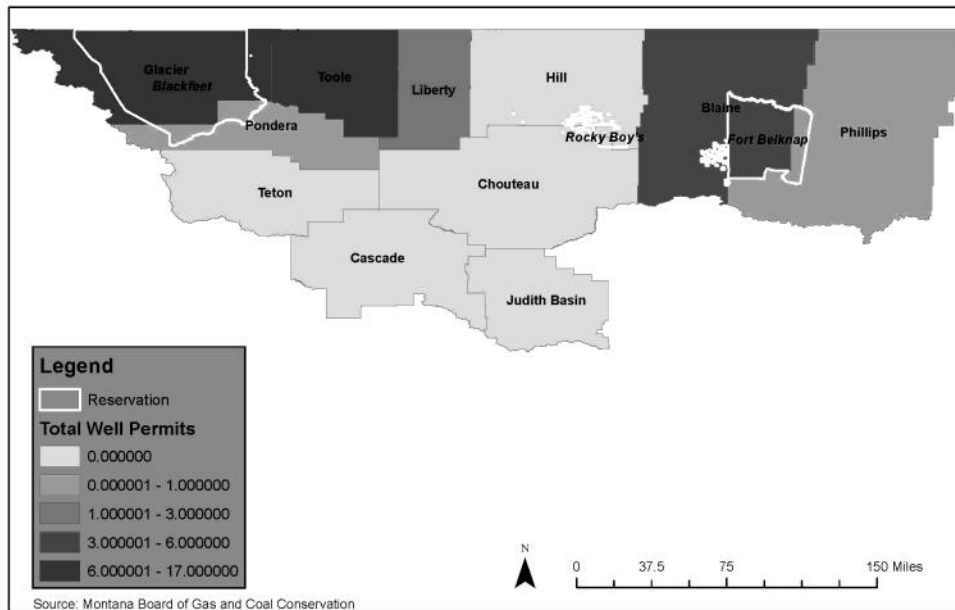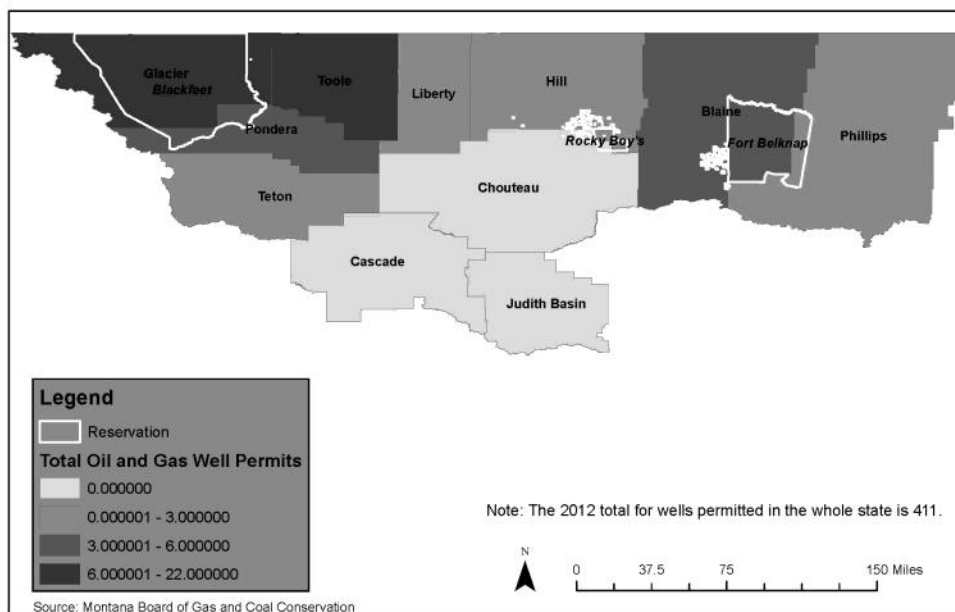
Proposed Promise Zone Crime Rates by County

Total Methamphetamine Lab Busts (1997-2013) by County
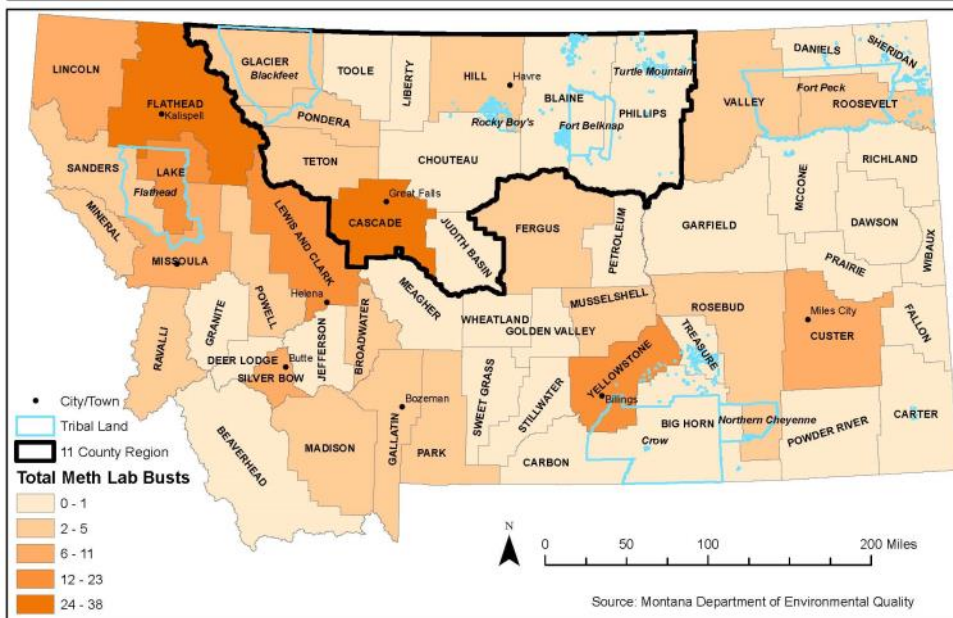
2013 Oil and Gas Well Permits

Legend
Reservation
Total Well Permits
0.000000
0.000001 - 1.000000
1.000001 - 3.000000
3.000001 - 6.000000
6.000001 - 17.000000

Source: Montana Board of Gas and Coal Conservation

2012 Oil and Gas Well Permits

Legend
Reservation
Total Oil and Gas Well Permits
0.000000
0.000001 - 3.000000
3.000001 - 6.000000
6.000001 - 22.000000

Note: The 2012 total for wells permitted in the whole state is 411.

Source: Montana Board of Gas and Coal Conservation

2007-2011 5-Year Estimate: Education Attainment - Less than High School

Legend

- Reservation
- County

Education Attainment (Pop. 25 and older) by Census Tract
Less than High School (Percent)

- 0.000000 - 0.039243
- 0.039244 - 0.097512
- 0.097513 - 0.140954
- 0.140955 - 0.192479
- 0.192480 - 0.264778

Source: 2007-2011 ACS 5-year Estimates
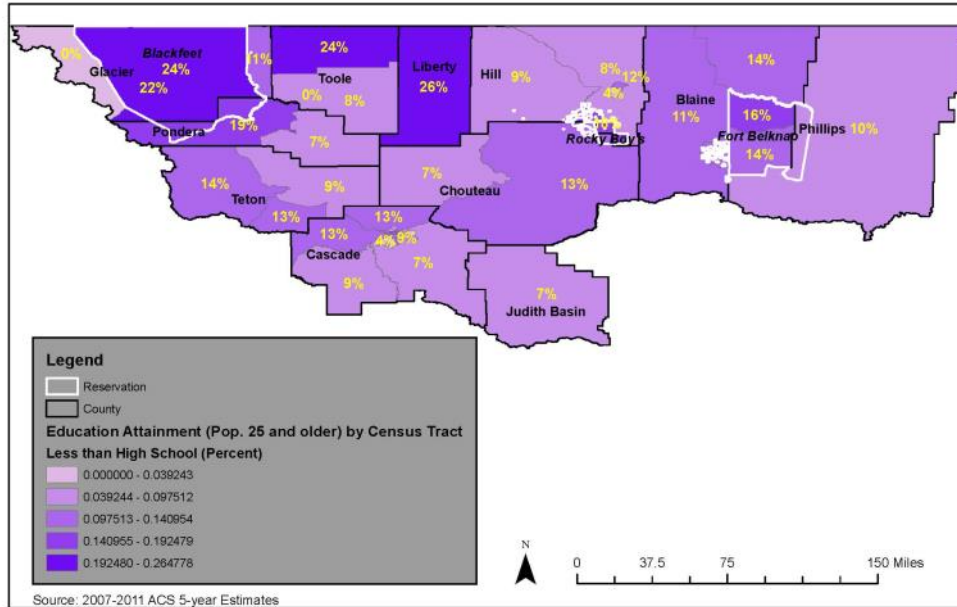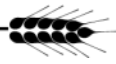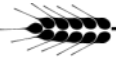
2007-2011 5-Year Estimate: Education Attainment - Bachelor's Degree

Legend

- Reservation
- County

Education Attainment (Pop. 25 and older) by Census Tract
Bachelor's Degree (Percent)

- 0.045726 - 0.072635
- 0.072636 - 0.145613
- 0.145614 - 0.202303
- 0.202304 - 0.293620
- 0.293621 - 0.466102

Source: 2007-2011 ACS 5-year Estimates

160

Schools and Colleges

Legend
- Reservation
- County
- ○ Incorporated Place
- ● Census Designated Place
- College (7)
- Grade School (65)
- High School (42)
- Middle School (45)
- Mixed K-12 (60)

Source: Directory of Montana Schools 2003-2004

N

0   37.5   75   150 Miles

Appendix I
Additional Vibrant Futures
Online Resources

GROWTH POLICY REVIEW—This review was completed in 2012 to assess nine county Growth Plans (adopted from 2003 to 2011) and 14 municipal Growth Plans (1999 to 2011) for responsiveness to Montana Annotated Code requirements; local data collected and needed; and opportunities to incorporate sustainability principles into planning. MCA requires Growth Plans to be updated every five years.

COMMUNITY WORD CLOUDS—Compiled for each of the 23 communities that hosted a Community Roundtable, these images represent topics of discussion in response to the question, "What can we do to make things better?" The word clouds illustrate relative "volume" of topics, as words repeated most frequently are largest. Word clouds show what is important to each community.

MAPPED LAND USE DATA—Data maps for every county showing Conservation Easements; Crop Land; Gravel Sites; Land Cover (Level 1); Watersheds; and Wildland-Urban Interface.

PLANNING WEBINARS—(Streaming audio/video presentations with PDF slides)
- Montana Code Annotated – Understand the laws by which Montana state entities must abide and how to effectively incorporate them into growth policies.
- Growth Policy Successes and Pitfalls- Information on best methods for conducting outreach, collecting community input, and composing growth policies, plus policies to avoid.
- Planning Trends and Growth Policies - Reviews planning trends that occur within the development of growth policies, including building resiliency, leveraging resources, incorporating systems thinking, and promoting equity.
- Advancing Community Priorities - Guest speakers David Jaber from the Oyate Omniciye of the Oglala Sioux Tribe (Pine Ridge Reservation) and Carrie Runser-Turner from the GroWNC in Western North Carolina provide examples of local and regional planning efforts. Jennie Rodgers of Rural Community Assistance Corporation tells how local communities incorporate their priorities into the *Vibrant Futures* Regional Plan.
- The Utility of Mapping - How to access county maps (watersheds, gravel sites, health services, etc.) and use the basic mapping tools, including *Vibrant Futures* data, on ArcGIS online.
- Using the Regional Plan – Use *Vibrant Futures* community input, data, and mapping resources for your work in planning, project development, and grant writing.

EMERGING REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND PROJECTS—Some communities in Northcentral Montana are working together to tackle projects too large to undertake alone. Learn who is working on senior housing, tourism, art entrepreneurship, Main Street revitalization, and trails.

REPORT: Fair Housing Equity Assessment—Completed as a condition of the 2012 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, this report responds to questions asked by HUD of all grantees and includes county and reservation-level data on demographic trends, racial composition, poverty, and housing access for Northcentral Montana.

Appendix J
Report Summary: Housing Equity and Opportunity in Northcentral Montana

I. Improving Access to Housing

Northcentral Montana residents know that access to housing is key to community vitality. High quality, affordable housing allows communities to attract the population needed to staff new businesses, build community centers and business districts, and maintain schools and other essential services.

Housing improvement is a potential economic driver that could create jobs, stop population loss, and attract state and public investment to the region. Northcentral Montana residents want new single and multi-family rental units; accessibility renovations and energy-efficient retrofits of existing homes; removal of substandard structures; infrastructure improvements to support development; and affordable home ownership. Residents and experts agree that housing is central to economic and social wellbeing:

- Without adequate housing, communities cannot land new industry and employers;

- Without adequate housing, business development cannot attract new residents;

- Without adequate housing, communities cannot grow with young families;

- Without adequate housing, elders cannot "age-in-place."

II. Regional Housing Approach

Northcentral Montana is united by a regional economy in which communities are mutually dependent for jobs, retail goods, services, infrastructure, and cultural events. The entire region benefits economically when rural and tribal communities thrive. Poverty is reduced when we create more equitable access to opportunity for residents of all Northcentral Montana communities—urban, rural, and tribal.

Like other forms of built infrastructure, housing is more easily developed in urbanized, populated areas. Small, remote communities have difficulty planning for improvements and attracting needed investments. A regional approach brings them into collaboration, making the scope of development more equal with urban areas in resources and potential. It reflects the Vibrant Futures finding that what is good for rural and tribal communities is good for all.

Small communities can work together to create needed housing supply. Communities can pool resources and assets to secure needed financing that will bring better housing to residents of remote areas.

DID YOU KNOW?

When home loan denial rates are broken down by race and ethnicity, **Native Americans** experienced the highest denial rates in the region **(27.5%)** followed by African Americans (18.6%.)

REGIONAL FACT:

88% of the region's fair housing complaints were based on **race or disability,** compared to 74% statewide.
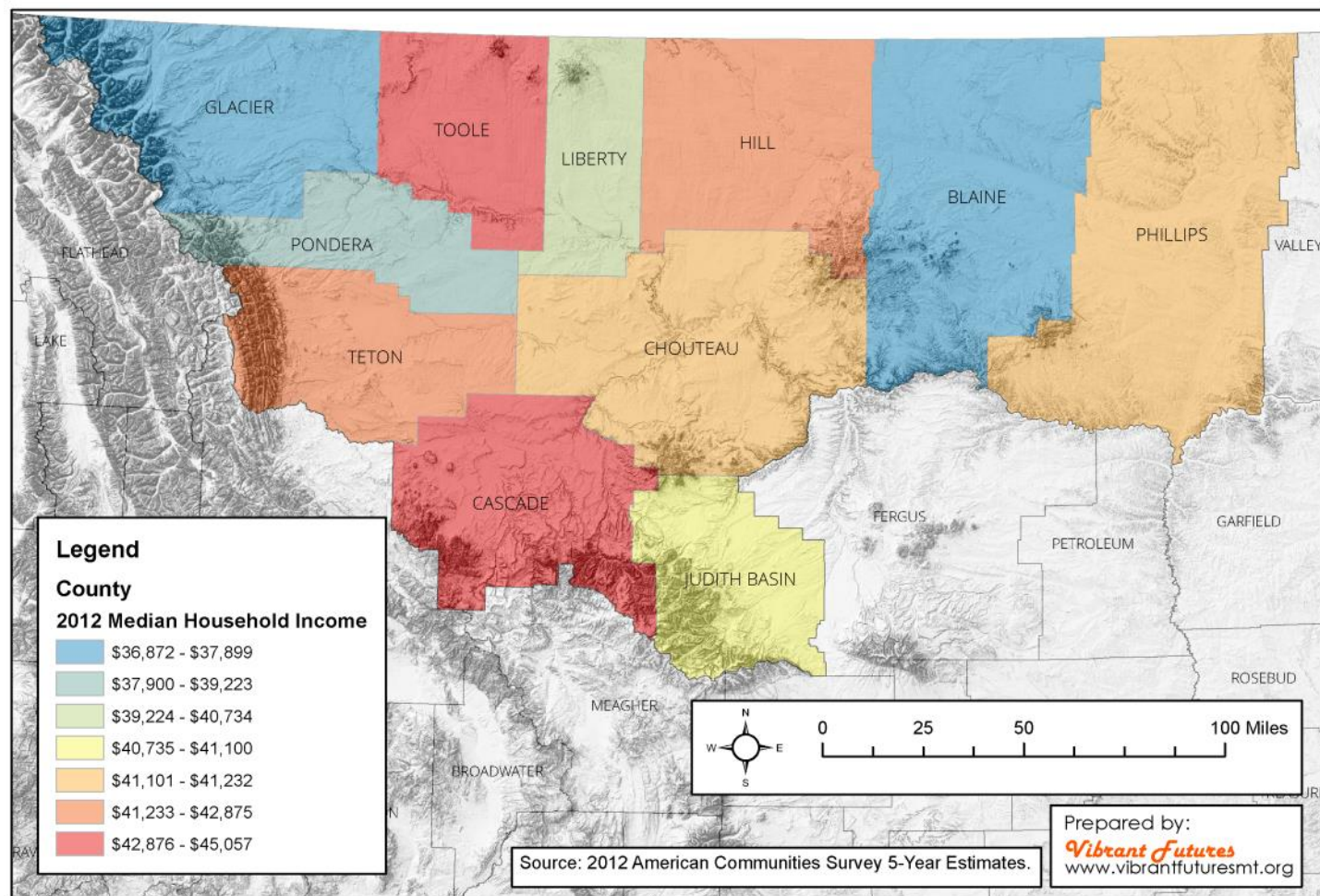
III. Housing Inequity

Vibrant Futures research shows that residents of metropolitan Cascade County and urban Great Falls have a more varied housing market, greater housing access for low income and disabled residents, and more access to Fair Housing advocacy than their neighbors in rural and tribal communities.

In the rural and tribal communities of Northcentral Montana, housing is more limited in supply; housing stock is older on average; residential structures are more frequently in poor condition and not energy efficient. Heating fuel and transportation to employment are more costly for residents of remote areas.

At the same time, rural and tribal communities face greater difficulty in attracting housing investment. Low population numbers diminish economy of scale; geographic isolation increases costs of development; residents demonstrate lower incomes on average. This makes isolated rural and tribal communities less profitable for private development and less able to compete with metropolitan areas for investments.

VF findings point out the need to support housing development in rural and tribal communities in order to preserve economic vitality for all residents, both inside and outside of urban areas.

2012 Median Household Income by Region County

Legend

County

2012 Median Household Income

- $36,872 - $37,899
- $37,900 - $39,223
- $39,224 - $40,734
- $40,735 - $41,100
- $41,101 - $41,232
- $41,233 - $42,875
- $42,876 - $45,057

Source: 2012 American Communities Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Prepared by:
Vibrant Futures
www.vibrantfuturesmt.org

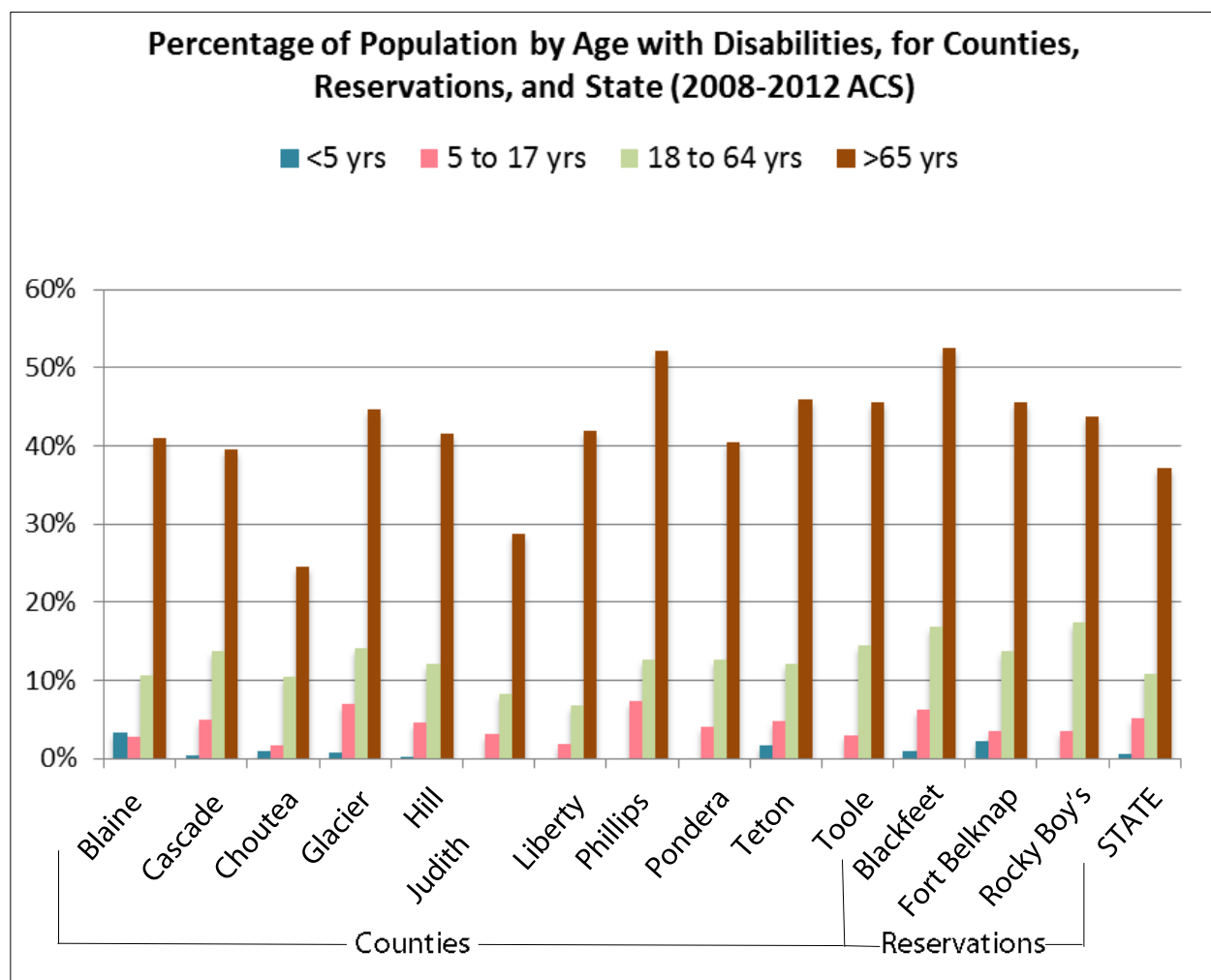# IV. Aging, Disabilities, and Racial Discrimination

In the past, rural residents with disabilities have migrated to hub communities where services are more readily available. However, as rural populations now experience rapid aging, elderly residents prefer to age in place. Higher numbers of rural residents now demonstrate limited mobility and greater need for medical services. This has increased the rural demand for handicapped accessible housing. Knowing that seniors prefer to stay in their homes as long as possible, new housing should demonstrate universal design to allow for future accommodations. Home improvements for accessibility are possible but expensive; limited subsidies are available in the form of federal grants and loans. Accessible housing must also include access to transportation and essential services.
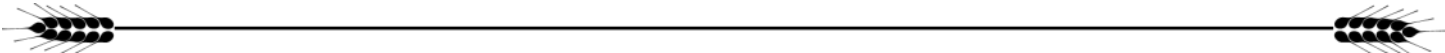
DID YOU KNOW?

The 2000 Census showed Montana's **disability rate** at 17.5% while census tracts in Great Falls and Rocky Boy's Reservations demonstrated rates from **35.1% to 51.5%.**

REGIONAL FACT:

By 2009, the American Community Survey estimated that **9 of the 11 counties** in the region showed percentages of **residents with disabilities** greater than the state average.

Percentage of Population by Age with Disabilities, for Counties, Reservations, and State (2008-2012 ACS)

■ <5 yrs ■ 5 to 17 yrs ■ 18 to 64 yrs ■ >65 yrs

Reservation residents have difficulty securing home mortgage loans. Montana's *2009 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing* documents that loan denial rates are highest on and around reservations; loan denials are most frequent for Native American applicants. HUD Section 184 loan guarantees are designed to make traditional bank loans more accessible to Indian homebuyers, yet banks remain wary of making mortgage loans for homes on Indian deed lands.

This violates federal fair housing law, and can be remedied through improved fair housing education, outreach to lenders and homebuyers in Northcentral Montana, and implementation of new tribal leasing and property assessment practices as allowed under the 2012 HEARTH Act.

V. Regional Solutions to Equitable Housing

Housing programs at all levels of government can adopt policies that recognize the efforts of communities to work across jurisdictions in seeking housing investment. The following strategies and housing policy suggestions were generated by regional housing experts and provide a good starting point for education and change.

Rural and/or tribal collaboration.

Remote communities can create partnerships to develop new housing and to attract funding for housing renovation and retrofit. By working together, small communities can attain economy of scale and market competitiveness. Federal and state funders should credit regional collaboration by awarding priority to applicants who aggregate rural and/or tribal communities and coordinate housing investment across multiple jurisdictions.

Improved access to Fair Housing education.

Improved access to Fair Housing services in rural and tribal communities would reduce current barriers to equitable housing. These barriers include confusion about fair housing issues and rights, low numbers of Fair Housing complaints and investigations, and high rates of mortgage denial for racial minorities.
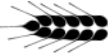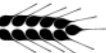
State funding for housing.

The State of Montana provides no direct funds for housing. Instead, all housing and community development funding is provided by federal programs through HUD, USDA Rural Development, and IRS Low Income Housing Tax Credits. State housing incentive funds would align Montana with 44 other states that augment federal funds in order to improve housing conditions, advance access to homeownership, and increase housing affordability.

Improve Homeownership on Reservations.

Reservation home ownership has been slow to develop due to cumbersome Bureau of Indian Affairs land lease requirements, lack of lending infrastructure, and limited borrower capacity. In response to these barriers, the Montana-Wyoming Tribal Housing Coalition has developed a 3-point strategy:

- Create a reservation-specific home valuators similar to appraisers, recognized by Tribes and Bureau of Indian Affairs, to valuate homes on fee and restricted lands with knowledge of land restrictions, comparable sales, leasehold values, and cost of local construction. *The MT-WY Tribal Housing Coalition intends to work with University of Montana Indian Law Clinic to develop a model ordinance outlining requirements and authorities of this new classification.*

- Develop model regulations consistent with requirements of the HEARTH Act of 2012, which allows tribes to execute residential leases without BIA review and processing. *The MT-WY Tribal Housing Coalition will all have a document prepared for Tribal Council actions in June 2015.*

- Establish tribal recording offices or contract with Counties to expand their services, so that tribal land transactions, lease activities, and court records are accurately maintained.

Policy Recommendations

These policy recommendations are intended to improve housing and employment while valuing resident access to enduring communities, traditions, and family. Rural residents value small, safe, clean towns that demonstrate tight-knit relationships and offer local support to residents. Residents of tribal communities value daily access to place-based traditional culture and an expansive community of relatives. Rather than relocate for improved living conditions, rural and tribal residents seek improved housing and employment opportunities that are developed locally. They feel that the value of their communities' social assets are competitive with urban opportunities for income and advancement. They want to see basic economic infrastructure improvements—jobs, housing, services and amenities—that will allow young adults *to stay*, and all residents to live vibrant lives in Northcentral Montana.

Policy Recommendations-Funding and Resources

1. Seek HUD and other funding for development of reservation infrastructure so that new homes can be sited.
2. Seek funding to rehabilitate de-listed Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA) rental units and previously purchased Malmstrom Air Force Base units for reservation home ownership.
3. Support rural and tribal access to "single closing" loans so that construction-to-own for new homes and infrastructure are affordable and convenient.
4. Advocate for increased funding for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program and improved portability between communities.
5. Develop a state-funded Montana Housing Investment Fund to incentivize housing development, boost Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC), boost workforce housing tax credits, and incentivize housing investment to rural areas.
6. Identify additional funding for retrofitting rural housing stock to improve quality, energy efficiency, and disabilities access.
7. Strengthen homeownership programs for tribes, counties, and municipalities so that more moderate-income renters can purchase a home.
8. Create new tribal lands leasing and assessment policies and practices as allowed in the federal HEARTH Act of 2012 .
9. Prioritize state housing applications that demonstrate universal design, visitability features, and accessible pathways.
10. Fund emergency homeless shelters to incorporate features of accessible design and partner with other community resources so that people with limited mobility and disabilities can be accommodated.

Policy Recommendations-Education and Outreach

1. Develop an information clearinghouse and/or on-line database coordinated among agencies to educate partners about housing programs.
2. Educate bankers about HUD Section 184 Loan Guarantees, fair housing mortgage lending requirements, and unacceptably high mortgage loan denial rates on and near Northcentral Montana reservations.
3. Encourage HUD to continue valuating housing units after 30 years thereby allowing continued maintenance of older housing for tribal and low-income communities.
4. Allow state programs for water/sewage treatment and other infrastructure to expand and rebuild, rather than simply repair, existing systems.
5. Support hire of local workers for housing development and rehabilitation projects. Collaborate with workforce training systems to include housing trades. Assist local contractors to meet bonding and insurance requirements. Encourage local sourcing of materials.
6. Support fair housing monitoring and enforcement.
7. Establish fair market rent levels that are sufficient to support tenant choice.

Policy Recommendations– Regional Collaboration

1. Urge USDA and HUD to accept applications from regional partnerships recognizing that rural regions must aggregate across jurisdictions in order to field effective proposals.
2. Urge Montana Department of Commerce to accept applications from partnering rural communities for Community Development Block Grants or LIHTC funds for homeownership and/or affordable rental development.
3. Encourage federal, state, tribal, county, municipal, and private partnerships that can leverage resources for low-cost financing to improve water and sewer services.
4. Document shared housing gaps across Northcentral Montana; identify mutual goals and complementary assets among neighboring jurisdictions.
5. Encourage planning and partnerships at all levels to support mixed income and mixed-use housing development, universal design elements, and visitability features.
6. Encourage federal, state, tribal, county, municipal, and private partnerships to secure loan deferrals, low-interest loans, soft seconds, credit sales, grants, and vouchers for affordable rental units.

DID YOU KNOW?
Montana is projected to have the fifth highest percentage of **residents over age 65** in the nation by 2030 and consequently will demonstrate a high elderly dependency ratio.

REGIONAL FACT:
In 2000, **92.5%** of all Native Americans in the region lived in Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty compared to 3.4% of whites in region.

REGIONAL FACT:
Poverty is not limited to reservation counties. 2007-2011 ACS estimates showed that **35% of census tracts** within the region had **poverty rates** greater than 20% (the highest was 44%, average was 29%)