

Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation
Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy 2022-2027

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Executive Summary

The Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) was established in 2006. This public benefit, regional economic development corporation is a private, nonprofit organization incorporated under the laws of the State of Montana. The five counties of Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie, and Wibaux, along with the incorporated communities of Baker, Ekalaka, Glendive, Plevna, Richey, Terry, and Wibaux, joined forces to create a means to encourage, stimulate, and promote economic development in this area of Montana. The commissioners from each county government agreed to the formation of the EPEDC and passed resolutions in support of the formation of an Economic Development District.

The EPEDC is an organization of cities, towns, counties, economic development organizations, and private citizens brought together for the purpose of forming and maintaining an Economic Development District. This area is also a five-county Certified Regional Development Corporation approved by the State of Montana (see Appendix A). The Southeastern Montana Development Corporation (SEMDC) of Colstrip, Montana currently provides Revolving Loan Funds for this CRDC and the Small Business Development Center at Miles Community College provides small business assistance for the southeastern Montana region, which includes the five counties within the EPEDC area.

The EPEDC also participates, along with SEMDC and Great Northern Development Corporation, in the Eastern Montana Brownfields Coalition (EMBC) which serves the 15-county region.



CEDS Process

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development of the five counties of Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie and Wibaux, as well as the cities and towns within those counties, including Baker, Ekalaka, Glendive, Plevna, Richey, Terry and Wibaux. This planning document, which includes implementation components, is designed to increase job creation and retention as well as the area's tax base, to foster a more stable and diverse economy, to improve the standard of living, and to provide a vehicle with which to help the region focus on their communities' future needs and responsibilities.

During CEDS strategy meetings held throughout the region, residents and local officials expressed a desire to initiate projects that will provoke sustainable, multi-faceted economic development. The most often mentioned projects included the desire to improve the local economy, address workforce issues, improve and expand local infrastructure, expand the use of natural resources, and encourage tourism within the area. Public input from this process was categorized into EPEDC's five focus areas—**Economy, Workforce, Infrastructure, Natural Resources, and Tourism.**

The Economic Development Administration (EDA), a division of the U.S. Department of Administration mandates that every five years the EDD must update the CEDS document. It is revised annually to reflect the changing objectives and goals determined by the needs of the local community.

The EDA provides the following insight in the description of the CEDS as:

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) contributes to effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. Economic development planning – as implemented through the CEDS – is not only a cornerstone of the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) programs, but successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. The CEDS provides the capacity- building foundation by which the public sector, working in conjunction with other economic actors (individuals, firms, industries), creates the environment for regional economic prosperity.



Organizational Profile

The Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) is a non-profit, tax-exempt organization, classified as a 501(c)(3) by the IRS. Copies of the EPEDC Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws can be supplied upon request. EPEDC was established in 2006 as a public benefit, regional non-profit corporation. The five (5) counties of Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie, and Wibaux, along with the communities of Baker, Ekalaka, Glendive, Plevna, Richey, Terry, and Wibaux, joined forces to create a means to stimulate and promote economic development in southeastern Montana.

As an organization of towns, cities, counties, local economic development groups, and civic leaders, EPEDC sought to bring these organizations together for the purpose of forming and maintaining an Economic Development District (EDD). The region is also a Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC) in the state of Montana.

EPEDC is continually striving to build new relationships with community members and welcomes opportunities to build bridges between the public and private sectors in our communities.

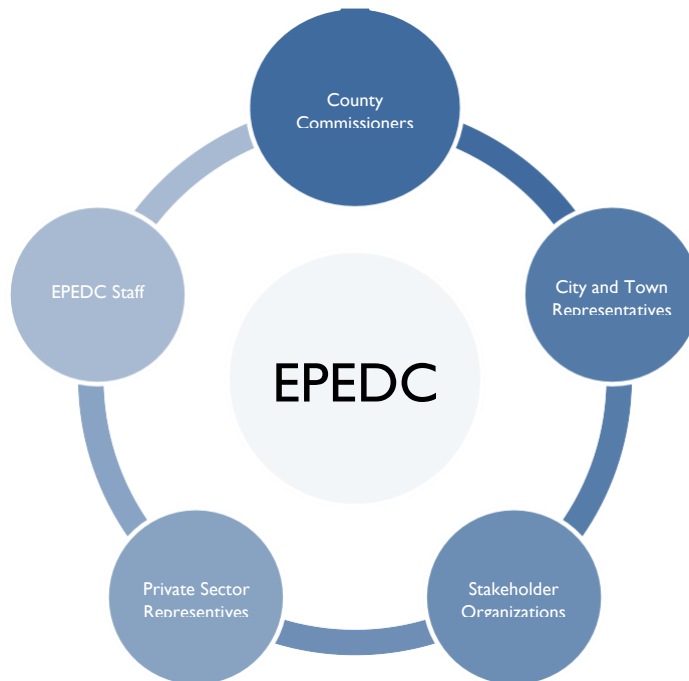
The participating governments and communities are:

Carter County	Town of Ekalaka
Dawson County	City of Glendive
	Town of Richey
Fallon County	City of Baker
	Town of Plevna
Prairie County	Town of Terry
Wibaux County	Town of Wibaux



The EPEDC Board of Directors is composed of nineteen (19) individuals from the respective district. A County Commissioner from each of EPEDC’s five counties, as well as six of the seven town/city councils are also represented by individuals appointed by their respective local governments as board members. Furthermore, Southeastern Montana Area Revitalization Team (SMART), Glendive Job Service, Prairie County Economic Development Council (PCEDC), and Wibaux County Chamber of Commerce serve in various capacities on the Board of Directors.

There is currently one individual representing the private sector and one at-large member. The Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors currently has 19 members. The Board of Directors is composed of 8 elected officials, 10 non-government representatives, and 1 at-large member.





Board Members	Position on the Board	Representation
Todd Devlin	Vice Chairman (exec. comm.)	Prairie County Commissioner
Lynn Schilling	Board member	Town of Terry Clerk
Dennis Zander	Chairman (exec. comm.)	Dawson County Commissioner
Teresea Olson	Board member	City of Glendive Mayor
Steve Baldwin	Board member (exec. comm.)	Fallon County Commissioner
Kevin Dukart	Board member	City of Baker Clerk
Jordan Hoffman	Board member	Town of Plevna Clerk
Rod Tauck	Board member (exec. comm.)	Carter County Commissioner
Mariah Schneider	Board member	Town of Ekalaka Clerk
Darin Miske	Treasurer (exec. comm.)	Wibaux County Commissioner
Jeff Bertelsen	Board member	Town of Wibaux Mayor
Tod Kasten	Board member	Stockman Bank Loan Officer (private sector)
Kitty Schmidt	Board member	City of Glendive Director of Operations
Nadine Brown	Board member	Town of Richey
Wanda VanVleet	Board member	Wibaux Chamber President (stakeholder org.)
Amy Deines	Board member	Glendive Job Service Manager (stakeholder org.)
Vaughn Zenko	Board member	SMART Executive Director (stakeholder org.)
Lance Kalfell	Board member	PCEDC Director (stakeholder org.)
Parker Powell	Board member	Glendive Medical Center Administrator (at-large representative)



Summary Background

The summary background provides context for the economic conditions of the economic development district and region.

The EPEDC region of eastern Montana experienced an influx of tens of thousands of homestead farmers due to the passage of the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1909. While they came in search of inexpensive land and were rather prosperous until an extended drought and a decrease in market prices after World War I ruined them economically. These factors led to the homestead "bust", forcing many farmers to leave the state.

For many Montanans, the depression extended through the 1920s and into the Great Depression of the 1930s. With FDR's "New Deal," came the formation of various projects and agencies that benefited the state and marked the first real dependence of the state on federal spending in the 20th century. This dependence of the state on the federal government continues with the State of Montana receiving 46.1% of its General Revenue coming from Federal Aid (the highest in the nation) according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Tax Foundation for Fiscal Year 2017.

From 1945 through the early-2000's, "modern" Montana was characterized by a slow shift from an economy that relied on the extraction of natural resources to one that was service-base, while agriculture remained Montana's primary industry. This era also witnessed the state's transportation system move from a heavy reliance on railroads to more convenient cars, trucks, and highways. Economic and major technological advancements also occurred during this period. Montana has been experiencing a "tech boom" in the last decade. The tech sector in the state generated \$2.9 billion in revenues in 2020, \$400 million more than the previous year according to a recent study conducted by the University of Montana Bureau of Business and Economic Research (BBER). High tech companies paid an average of 59 percent more than the average earnings of a Montana worker.

Historically, ups and downs in the economy have been caused by escalating oil prices, sharp increases in interest rates, and drought conditions which led to decreased livestock numbers and irregular prices for agricultural commodities. The enrollment of farm land into the federal CRP program in the mid-1980s, followed by low commodity prices in the mid-1990s, coupled with rising input costs and poor weather conditions, drastically cut into the financial health of Montana's farm economy. Now, rural Montana faces an even greater challenge as the median age of farmers and ranchers rises, while children leave to pursue more lucrative job opportunities elsewhere.

In 2008 due to technological advances that allowed for increased oil and gas extraction in northeastern Montana and western North Dakota. An economic "boom" that is both a blessing and a challenge, as good paying jobs became more readily available, business owners benefited from increased sales, and county tax revenues began to grow. All while strain is placed on aging infrastructure, cities and towns face unforeseen planning and development issues, and housing demands force citizens and communities to deal with a



steep rise in the cost of living. The 2015 downturn in the oil and gas industry has made it evident the necessity of upgrading current infrastructure to be able to meet the demands of a “boom” and the need to capitalize on the increase in revenues while available. Long range planning is paramount to the stability of the region.

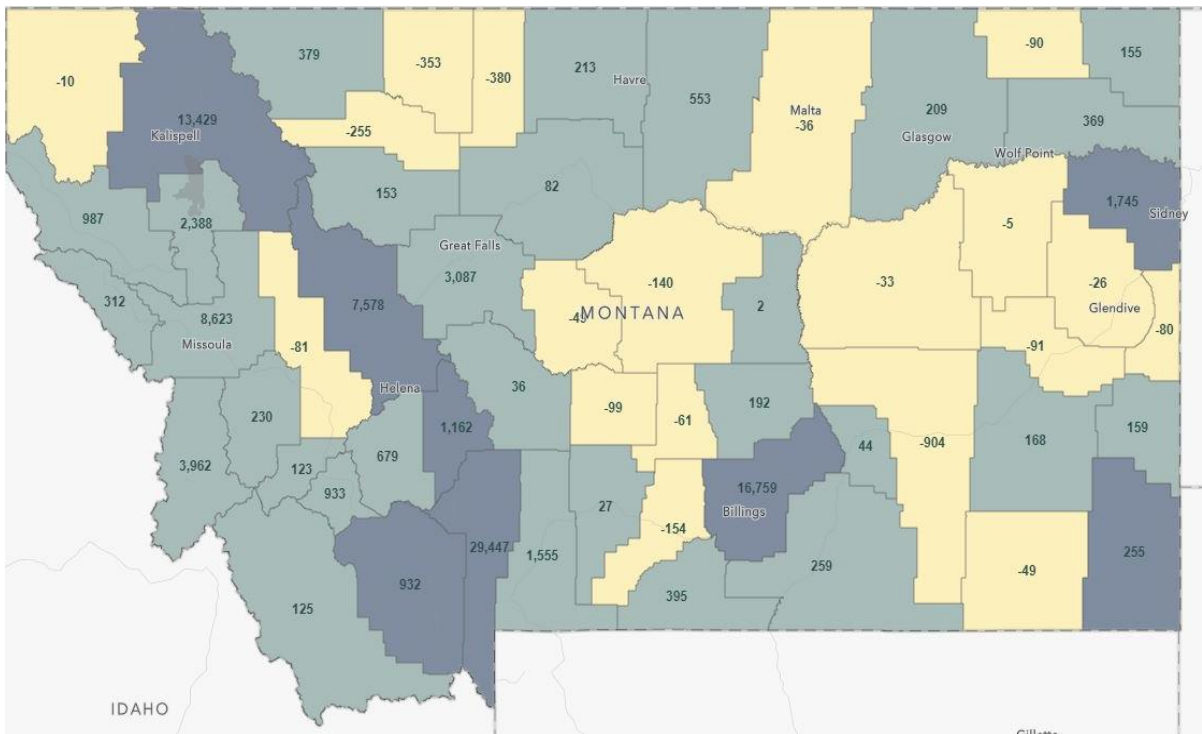


A. Demographic and Socioeconomic Background

TABLE 1: Population of the EPEDC Region by County				
	2000	2010	2020	Percent of change from 2010-2020
Carter	1,360	1,160	1,415	4.04
Dawson	9,059	8,966	8,940	-1.31
Fallon	2,837	2,890	3,049	7.39
Prairie	1,199	1,179	1,088	-9.26
Wibaux	1,068	1,017	937	-12.26
Total	15,523	15,212	15,429	-.60

<https://ceic.mt.gov/People-and-Housing/Population><https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/2020-population-and-housing-state-data.html>

Population Change from 2010-2020



<https://mtdoc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=f99e9d9469204df497bf2e38a51ec980>



Population Statistics- The 2020 Census indicates that the EPEDC's total population decreased by approximately 100 people, from a total population of 15,523 in 2000 to a total population of 15,429 in 2020; the total population has decreased by .6% since 2010 (Table 1, found above) Dawson County's 2020 population of 8,940 residents represents 58% of the district's total population.

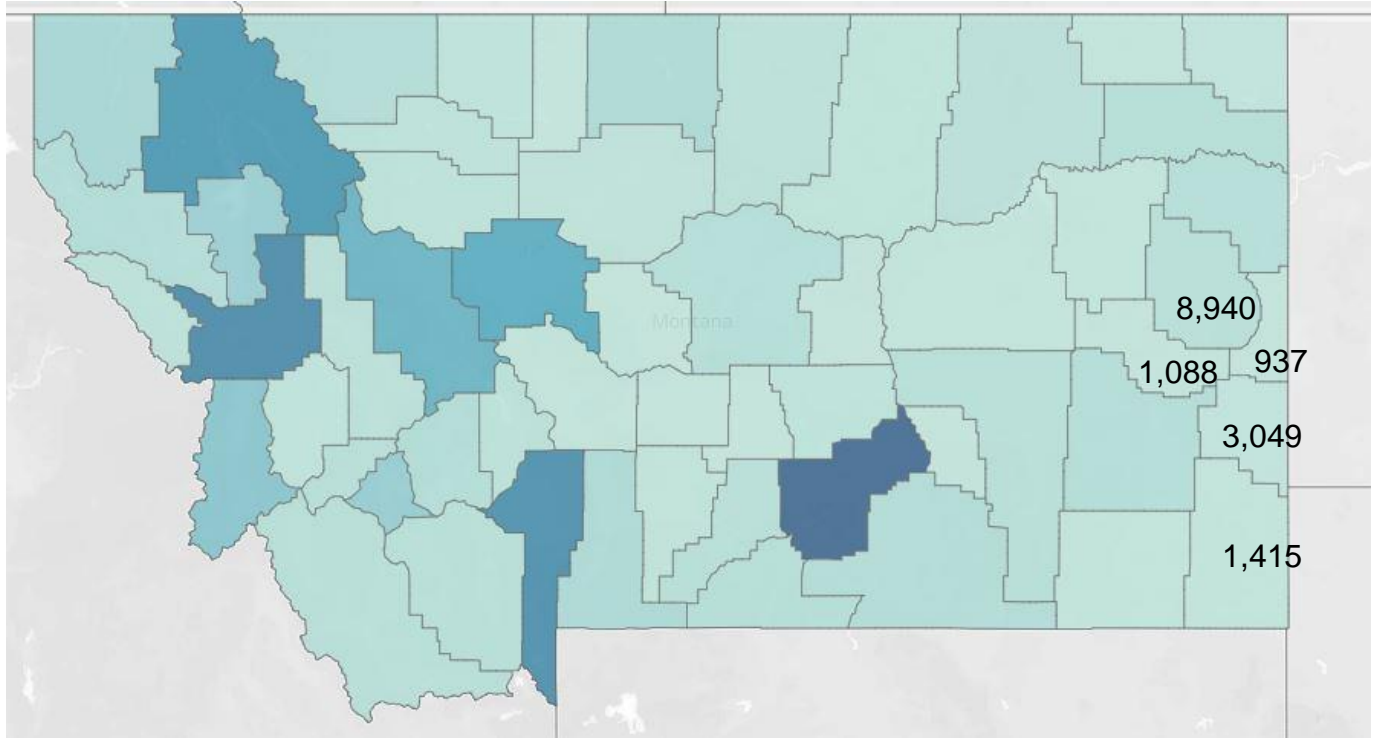
Population in the District peaked at 25,293 persons for the 1930 Census and declined to 15,429 persons at the 2020 Census. All of the counties within the EPEDC region are generally referred to as "rural," which according to the Census Bureau's classification, rural consists of all territory, population, and housing units located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters.

Urbanized areas include populations of at least 50,000, and urban clusters include populations between 2,500 and 50,000. The core areas of both urbanized areas and urban clusters are defined based on population density of 1,000 per square mile and then certain blocks adjacent to them are added that have at least 500 persons per square mile. According to the Census Bureau, Glendive is the District's only urban cluster (*Mueller, Keith, Ph.D. Issue Brief #2, "Choosing Rural Definitions: Implications for Health Policy." March 2007*).

However, all of the counties in the EPEDC region are more accurately defined as "frontier," i.e. counties with a population density of six or fewer people per square mile. The definition is also based on other factors such as travel distance in miles to the nearest medical facility and marketplace (<http://www.raconline.org/topics/frontier/frontierfaq.php>).

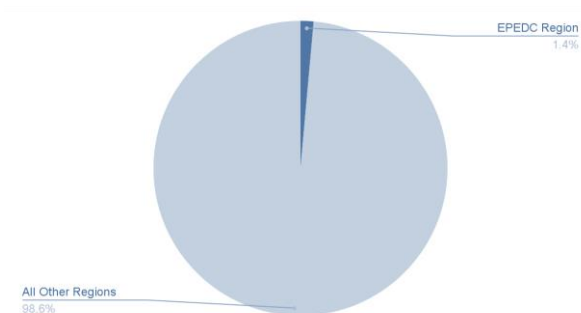


2020 Census Montana Population



https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/DOC/views/CEIC_POPULATION_CDC_BRIDGED_RACE/PopulationMap?%20%3Aorigin=card_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y

EPEDC as a Portion of Montana's Population



State of Montana's Total

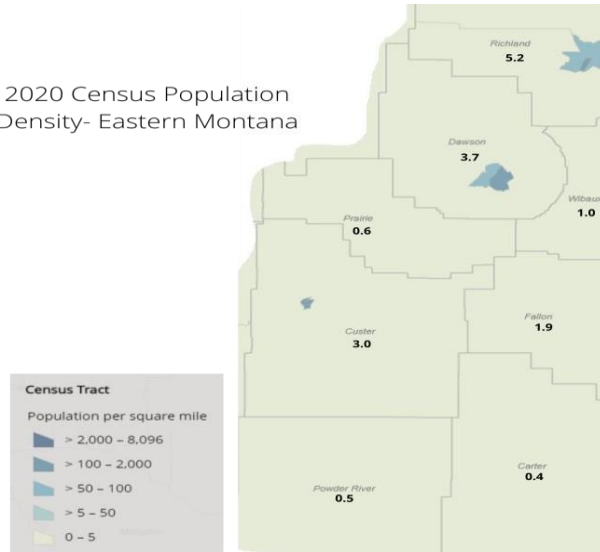
Population: 1,080,577

https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/DOC/views/CEIC_POPULATION_CDC_BRIDGED_RACE/PopulationTable?%20%3Aorigin=card_share_link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y

<http://ceic.mt.gov/Census2010.asp>



2020 Census Population Density- Eastern Montana



<https://mtdoc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=776b167aa4224fed862fa55ee5bce22f>

The EPEDC region has very little racial or ethnic diversity as indicated in Table 2. 92.5% of the District’s population is identified as “white” according to the 2020 Census, compared to Montana’s 84.9% white population. The largest minority race indicated by the EPEDC population was the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity which accounted for 2.6% of the Region’s total population. Comprising over half the District’s total population, Dawson County reported a 92.2% white population, slightly below the District average. It is critical that as local economies across our region that recovery and economic growth is done in an inclusive, equitable way. We are constantly working to connect with more organizations, communities, and underserved populations to build awareness of EPEDC’s programs and services.

TABLE 2: 2020 EPEDC Population by Race

County	White	Hispanic /Latino	Black	American Indian & Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific	Some Other Race	Two or More Races	Total Population
Carter	1,356	15	3	14	1	0	0	26	1,415
Dawson	8,180	265	44	214	56	0	3	178	8,940
Fallon	2,889	49	6	31	21	2	0	51	3,049
Prairie	970	51	4	17	8	0	0	38	1,088
Wibaux	874	34	3	12	5	0	0	9	937
Total	14,269	414	60	288	91	2	3	302	15,429
MT	937,375	44,454	6,505	72,645	9,758	1,084	209	30,359	1104271

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT.wibauxcountymontana.prairiecountymontana.falloncountymontana.dawsoncountymontana.cartercountymontana/RHI125220#RHI125220>



TABLE 3: Population of Incorporated Places in the EPEDC Region

	County	Percent of change from 2020-2020	2020	2010	2000
Ekalaka	Carter	5.83	399	332	377
Glendive	Dawson	2.0	4,873	4,935	4,777
Richey	Dawson	-12	167	177	189
Baker	Fallon	7.07	1,683	1,741	1,802
Plevna	Fallon	225	311	162	138
Terry	Prairie	-8.46	562	605	614
Wibaux	Wibaux	-17.5	462	589	560
TOTAL		1.07	8,929	8,541	8,339

https://www.montana-demographics.com/cities_by_population

Three out of the five counties and three out of seven communities experienced a decline in population. Overall, population growth within incorporated places was strong enough to offset the significant decreases in other communities. Most notably is the population increase in Fallon County showing over a 300 person increase. While the number of residents living within incorporated areas is increasing after decades of decline, agricultural populations living within unincorporated areas are still declining significantly. This is a trend that is prevalent throughout rural America, especially in eastern Montana. Incorporated populations now account for 57.9% of the EPEDC total population, while unincorporated populations amount to 42.1% of the district’s total.



TABLE 4: 2020 EPEDC Specific Age and Sex Demographics

	Montana	EPEDC Regional Average	Carter	Dawson	Fallon	Prairie	Wibaux
Population under 18 years	21.4	16.4	21.6	21.4	27.3	18.6	20.2
Population over 65 years	19.3	24.6	26.1	20.4	17.0	33.5	25.8
Percent of females	49.7	49.2	50.1	48.2	49.0	49.5	49.1
Percent of males	50.2	50.8	49.9	51.8	51.0	50.5	50.9

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT.wibauxcountymontana.prairiecountymontana.falloncountymontana.dawsoncountymontana.cartercountymontana/SEX255220#SEX255220>

TABLE 5: Median Age of Population

County	2000	2010	2020
Carter	41.8	50.2	53.3
Dawson	41	43.5	41.7
Fallon	41.1	42.9	35.3
Prairie	48.9	53.6	52.5
Wibaux	42.3	49	50.5
EPEDC Regional Average	43	47.8	46.6

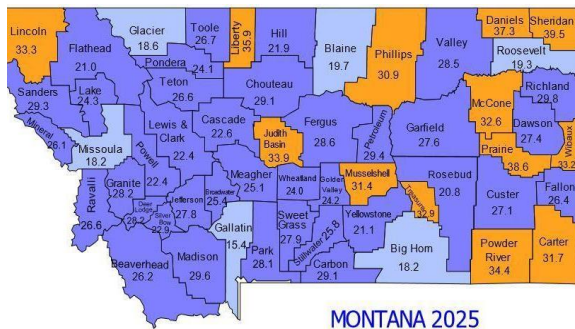
<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/release/tables?rid=430&eid=328377>

As outlined in Table 5, the average median age of residents was 46.6 in 2020, compared to 47.8 years in 2010. The median age of residents increased for two of the five counties and decreased for the other three counties since 2010. It is interesting to note the District’s “Population over 65 years” (Table 4) was nearly a full 7% higher than the Montana average in 2010 versus the 5.3% difference in 2020. At 33.5%, Prairie County had the highest percentage of population over the age of 65 out of any other county in Montana. Fallon County saw a decrease in age by over six years, which was the most significant



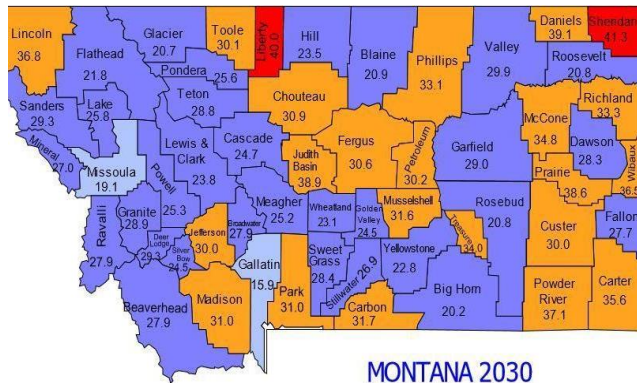
decrease in age. Population diversity by gender indicates the 2020 male population represents 50.8% and the female population represents 59.2% of the population in the District.

Montana's Aging Population Estimates



Percent of County Population 65+

- 0.0 to 9.9
- 10.0 to 19.9
- 20.0 to 29.9
- 30.0 to 39.9
- 40.0 to 49.9



<http://dphhs.mt.gov/Portals/85/sltc/documents/AgingReports/Map65-2000-2030.pdf>

Estimates indicate that the percent of EPEDC county population over 65 years of age will continue to increase over the next fifteen years, subsequently increasing the need for transitional facilities, elderly services, and specialized medical care. As indicated in Table 5 the projections as indicated in the 2020 map, are not too different from what was reported in the 2020 Census.

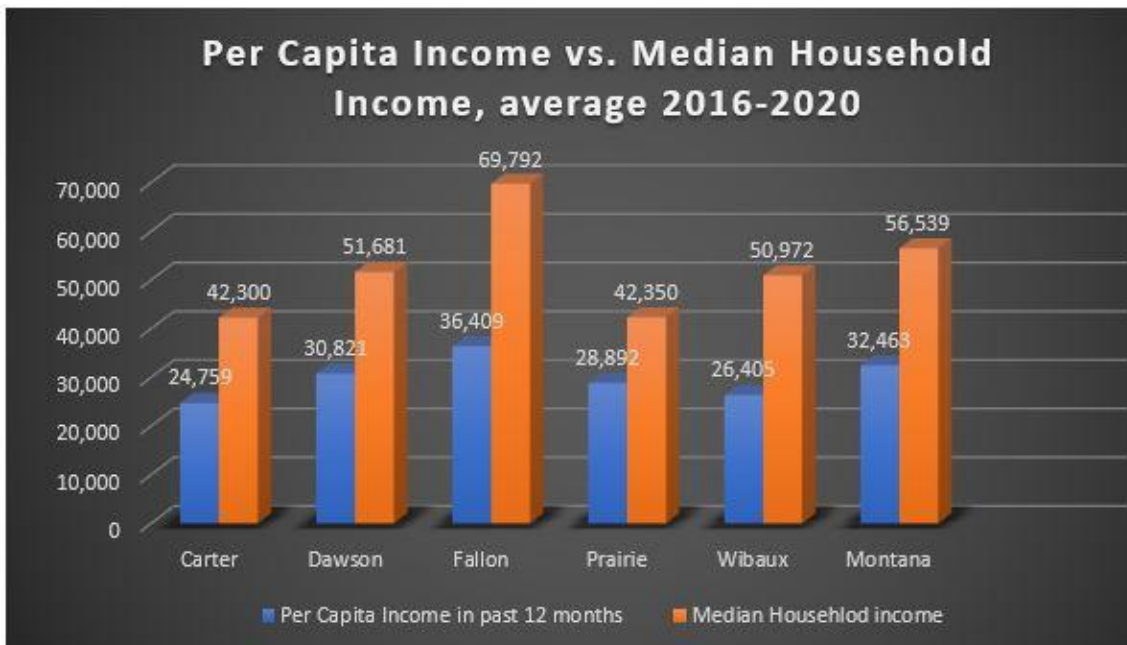


Poverty, Income, Business Overview - Information on 2020 households is presented in Table 7. There were 6,795 total households reported in the EPEDC region; 64.6% of those were family households, compared to 62.8% family households for Montana. Both the “male alone” (15.1%) and “female alone” (16.3%) as a percentage of total households for the region were higher than Montana’s 14.5% and 15.2%, respectively. Most significantly, the EPEDC percentage of households with “individuals under 18” (25.7%) is nearly three percentage points lower than the state’s 28.4%, and the EPEDC’s percentage of households with “individuals over 65” (30.9%) is more than five percentage points higher than the state’s 25.6%.

Table 7: 2020 EPEDC Household Statistics

County	Total households	Average household size	Family Households	Non-family households	Male alone	Female alone	Households with individuals under 18	Households with individuals over 65
Carter	650	1.96	354	178	74	87	109	182
Dawson	3,892	2.15	2,429	1,320	535	633	1,003	1,112
Fallon	1,274	2.26	810	423	187	184	350	359
Prairie	502	2.26	342	209	103	85	102	208
Wibaux	477	2.14	281	176	85	77	110	157
Total	6,795	2.15	4,216	2,306	984	1,066	1,674	2,018
Montana	436,048	2.37	257,087	152,520	59,524	62,251	116,376	104,994

Source: <https://ceic.mt.gov/People-and-Housing/Housing>



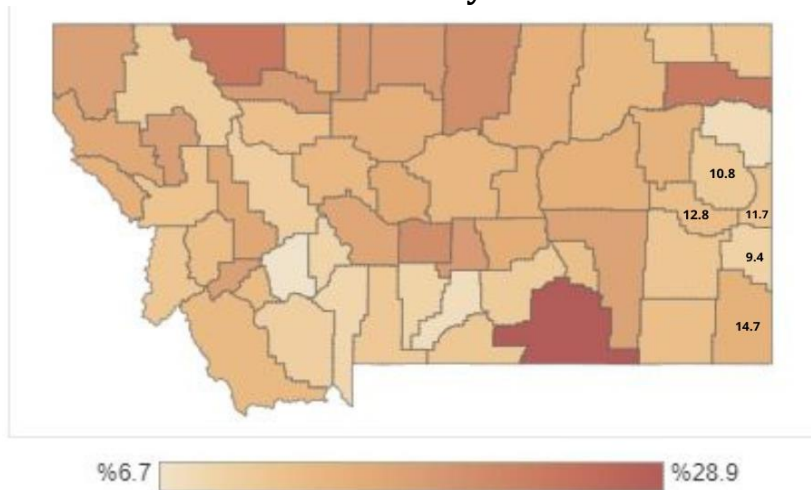
<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT.wibauxcountymontana.prairiecountymontana.falloncountymontana.dawsoncountymontana.cartercountymontana/HSG010221#HSG010221>



Per capita income, found above, varies substantially from year to year in eastern Montana due to the heavy influence of agriculture, which is inevitably affected by weather and market conditions. Typically, eastern Montana per capita income is less than the Montana average.

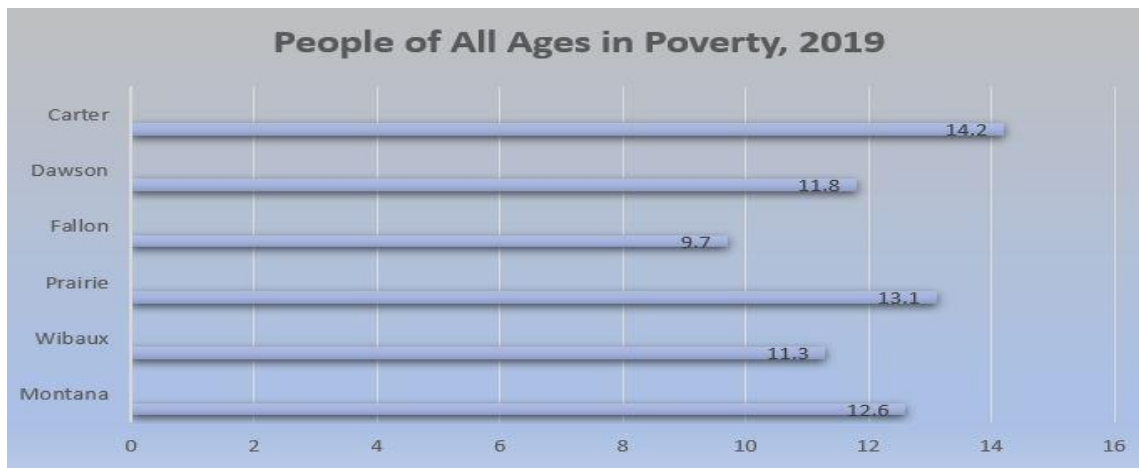
With the increase in oil and gas production and a rise in the need for related service industries, the EPEDC district average rose approximately \$2,000 on average to \$29,547.2 compared to Montana’s \$32,468(2016-2020), with all but one county falling below the Montana average. Household income levels increased to \$51,419 for the area between 2016 and 2020, relative to the state’s \$56,539.

Percent Below Poverty Level 2020



Source: Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) <https://ceic.mt.gov/People-and-Housing/Income-and-Poverty>

The State of Montana reported an average poverty rate of 11.7% for the EPEDC region in 2019. This is slightly below the State’s average of 12.6%.



Source: <https://ceic.mt.gov/People-and-Housing/Area-Profiles/Area-Profile-Map>



Civilian Labor Force - The District’s May 2022 civilian labor force (CLF) was 7,676 (Table 8). That number decreased from 8,060 in 2015 (Table 9). Unemployment for the region was 2.3% for the District in 2022. It can be assumed due to chronic unemployment issues within the EPEDC region that the current unemployed population will remain unemployed, and new laborers will need to come from other regions to fill any available jobs. This assertion is supported by the decrease in unemployment from 2015 to the 2022 figures, despite the District experiencing a global pandemic within that time period. These are non-seasonally adjusted. Montana expects to see a continued workforce shortage. Our workforce is 10,000 or more workers smaller than it was pre-pandemic – despite an influx of new residents from out-of-state. Montana is open for business, but a critical labor shortage, stemming in large part from a pandemic-era expansion of unemployment, affects nearly every industry in our economy. It’s a crisis that threatens to stifle growth and leave our economy behind.

TABLE 8: April 2021 County Labor Force Statistics

	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
Carter	620	606	14	2.3
Dawson	4,531	4,424	107	2.4
Fallon	1,610	1,580	30	1.9
Prairie	486	472	14	2.9
Wibaux	429	415	14	23.3
TOTAL	7,676	7,497	179	2.3
Montana	564,304	550,037	14,267	2.5

TABLE 9: April 2015 County Labor Force Statistics

	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate
Carter	690	670	20	2.9
Dawson	4,593	4,423	170	3.7
Fallon	1,748	1,694	54	3.1
Prairie	532	516	16	3
Wibaux	497	482	15	3
TOTAL	8,060	7,785	275	3.4
Montana	522,430	499,743	22,687	4.3

<https://lmi.mt.gov/>



Ag industries – Agriculture has historically and continues to be the backbone of Eastern Montana. With its colder winters, warmer summers, less cloudiness, and its heaviest precipitation in late spring and early summer, Eastern Montana remains a unique environment. Eastern Montana also has considerably higher average wind velocities, and summer hail storms may cause severe crop and property damage. Frost-free periods in the east and in the state’s low-lying river valleys range from 120 to 150 days per year.

“Montana farmers and ranchers experienced a challenging year in 2016 with lower grain and cattle prices and concerns about lower prices in 2017. Since January 2015, Montana wheat and calf prices have declined by 38 percent and 53 percent, respectively. Price forecasts for the next five years suggest steady to slightly higher prices in the wheat and barley markets and slightly lower prices in the cattle market.”

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MT,wibauxcountymontana,prairiecountymontana,falloncountymontana,dawsoncountymontana,cartercountymontana/HSG010221#HSG010221>
<https://mtdoc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=13f28485f07b435987b61dd577cae9a4>
<https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/snapshot-of-nations-housing-stock-2021.html>
<https://dphhs.mt.gov/StatisticalInformation/>
<https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=2566121a73de463995ed2b2fd7ff6eb7>
<https://mtdoc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=776b167aa4224fed862fa55ee5bce22f>
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<https://apps.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts/>
[https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/DOC/views/CEIC_POPULATION_CDC_BRIDGED_RACE/PopulationMap?%20%3Aorigin=card share link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y](https://dataportal.mt.gov/t/DOC/views/CEIC_POPULATION_CDC_BRIDGED_RACE/PopulationMap?%20%3Aorigin=card%20share%20link&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y)
<https://lmi.mt.gov/LocalAreaProfiles>
<https://ceic.mt.gov/>
<https://ceic.mt.gov/Programs/Census-2020/Differential-Privacy>
<https://ceic.mt.gov/Programs/Census-2020/Redistricting>
<https://brand.mt.gov/Programs/Marketing/Tourism-Research/>

With the rapid increase in acreage planted to lentils and dry peas, prices on these two products have become important to many producers. Lentil prices have been becoming less volatile, moving from nearly \$0.36 per pound in October to around than \$0.39 per pound in May. Pea prices have been less volatile and are selling around \$0.16 per pound. Price forecasts for both lentils and peas are somewhat optimistic for next year. Neither of these products are traded in the commodity markets, hence producers depend on forward contracting or elevator prices at harvest to market them.”

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Montana/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2021/Montana-Annual-Bulletin-2021.pdf



Table 10: Major Agricultural Crops and Livestock in EPEDC Region, 2019 and 2015

Commodity	2019 Production	2015 Production
Winter Wheat All	880,400 bushels	1,259,000 bushels
Spring Wheat Other	7,204,000 bushels	6,581,000 bushels
Corn	N/A	301,000 bushels
Peas Dry Edible	300,000 hundredweight	189,000 hundredweight
Beans Dry Edible	N/A	51,600 hundredweight
Sugarbeets	N/A	76,600 tons
Hay Alfalfa	N/A	245,000 tons
Hay Other	N/A	77,000 tons

Livestock	2020 Production	2015 Production
Cattle	242,000	229,000 head
Sheep	25,300	43,700 head
Hogs & Pigs	N/A	700 head

https://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Montana/Publications/Annual_Statistical_Bulletin/2021/Montana-Annual-Bulletin-2021.pdf

Montana's Top 5 Agriculture Commodities, 2020

	Value of Receipts, thousand \$	Percent of State Total Farm Receipts	Percent of U.S. Value
1. Cattle and calves	1,279,709	34.6	2.0
2. Wheat	1,052,269	28.4	11.9
3. Hay	446,765	12.1	6.1
4. Barley	185,468	5.0	25.8
5. Miscellaneous crops	118,025	3.2	.5
All commodities	3,700,477		1.0

https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?StateFIPS=30&StateName=Montana&ID=17854#P23d1b1a4d316411c9630ac0f9908003c_2_586iT21R0x0



Oil and gas production –32 counties, including all five in the EPEDC region, out of 56 in Montana produce oil and gas products. Fallon County is the 2nd largest producer of oil and gas in the entire state, following Richland County just to the north of the District.

Table 11: Annual oil & gas Production by EPEDC County						
	2021			2016		
	Oil	Natural Gas	Assoc. Gas	Oil	Natural Gas	Assoc. Gas
Carter	1,2158	0	0	15,184	0	0
Dawson	38,1854	0	25,266	654,115	0	331,789
Fallon	2,520,41	412,395	645,96	3,573,892	6,757,517	1,402,154
Prairie	2,713	0	411	50,957	0	0
Wibaux	26512	0	9,769	494,075	172,191	163,961
Total	423,237	412,395	35,446	4,788,223	6,929,708	1,897,904

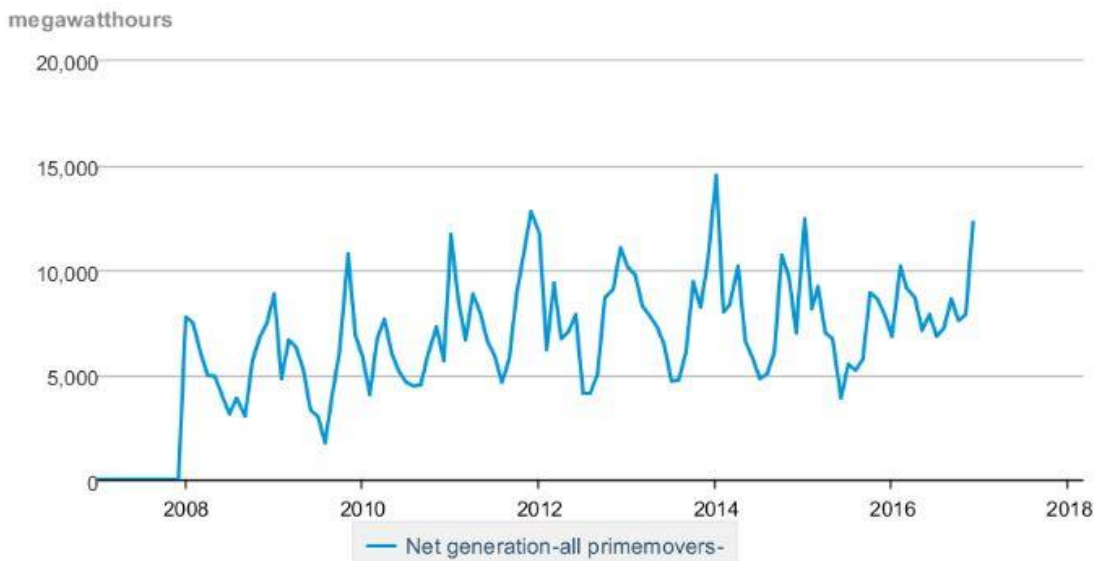
<http://www.bogc.dnrc.mt.gov/WebApps/DataMiner/Production/ProdAnnualCounty.aspx>



Wind Energy –In Montana, roughly 45% of the energy produced is from renewable energy, 7.5% from wind energy. Montana ranks 24th in the nation for installed wind energy production capacity, with 720MW. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Montana is ranked 5th for estimated potential onshore wind power. Taking advantage of that potential, wind energy in Montana has grown rapidly in the last decade.

Montana Dakota Utilities developed, operates, and receives power from the 30MW Diamond Willow Wind project outside of Baker. A single GE 1.5sle turbine went online in 2007, followed by 12 more in 2008. The Diamond Willow Extension site went online in 2010 with 7 more turbines.

Month	Jan-16	Feb-16	Mar-16	Apr-16	May-16	Jun-16
Energy Produced (megawatthours)	6802	10188	9140	8687	7088	7856
	Jul-16	Aug-16	Sep-16	Oct-16	Nov-16	Dec-16
	6842	7230	8613	7594	7835	12244



eia Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration



Montana has substantial renewable energy resources, and in 2021 it ranked among the top 10 states with the largest share of electricity generated from renewables. Renewable energy, primarily hydropower, accounted for 52% of Montana's in-state electricity. The state's mountainous terrain along the Continental Divide creates fast-running rivers from the 300 inches of snow and rain that fall in the region annually and provide the water resources for hydroelectric power generation. The headwaters of the Missouri River, the longest river in North America, are in the mountains of southwestern Montana. In 2021, Montana was the seventh-largest producer of hydroelectric power in the nation. The state has about two dozen utility-scale hydroelectric plants, and most of them are located in the western half of the state. Six of Montana's 10 largest power plants by generating capacity are hydroelectric facilities.

With its broad plains dotted with hills, wide river valleys, and occasional mountains, eastern Montana has some of the best utility-scale wind power potential in the nation. The first utility-scale wind farm in the state came online in 2005. Wind energy powers two of the state's 10 largest generating plants by both capacity and actual yearly generation. The largest wind facility, the 184-megawatt Rim Rock wind farm, is located near the Canadian border next to Glacier National Park. The second-largest wind facility, the 135-megawatt Judith Gap wind farm, is located near Lewistown in the center of the state. At the end of 2021, Montana had nearly 900 megawatts of wind power generating capacity in operation. Another 1,000 megawatts are in various stages of planning and construction.

In 2021, solar generated less than 1% of Montana's in-state electricity. Montana's solar power was provided only by small-scale (less than 1 megawatt) residential and business solar panel installations until 2017, when the state's first utility-scale (1 megawatt or larger) power facilities began generating electricity. In 2021, Montana had six utility-scale solar power farms with a combined generating capacity of 17 megawatts. An 80-megawatt solar farm near Billings is scheduled to come online in late 2022, and two solar projects totaling 24 megawatts are planned for the end of 2023.

Montana has biomass resources, and about 7 in 100 households heat their homes with wood. The state has the third-highest share of wood-burning households, after Maine and New Mexico. However, very little electricity generation in the state comes from biomass. The state's only utility-scale wood biomass-fueled generating facility has 3 megawatts of capacity and is owned by a lumber company in northwest Montana. An electric cooperative owns a 1.6-megawatt generating unit that is fueled by landfill gas. Woody biomass is also used as fuel in boilers to provide heat, mostly in western Montana schools, hospitals, and other public buildings.



Montana has geothermal resources, but there are no utility-scale electricity generating facilities in the state. Montana's most significant geothermal resources are in the mountainous southwest. Low- and moderate-temperature geothermal resources are found in nearly all areas of the state. Those geothermal resources have a variety of direct-use applications in Montana, including recreational hot springs, greenhouses, and fish farms. Several hot springs resorts and public bathing facilities in Montana use geothermal for space heating and mineral baths.

Enacted in 2005, Montana's renewable portfolio standard (RPS) requires electricity retail suppliers to acquire at least 15% of the electricity they sell in-state from renewable energy sources by 2015. They reached the requirement in 2015 and continue to meet it. Qualifying renewable resources include: wind, solar, geothermal, biomass, small hydroelectric facilities, landfill gas, anaerobic digesters, and renewable fuel cells. The RPS also requires electricity suppliers to buy a set amount of power from smaller, community-based renewable energy projects. Montana provides low-interest loans to households and businesses to pay for energy-saving measures, like energy-efficient appliances and windows. The loans also cover alternative energy systems, including solar panels, geothermal systems, wind generators, and low-emission wood stoves.

<https://www.eia.gov/state/analysis.php?sid=MT>

Tourism and recreation – The EPEDC region’s economy is greatly influenced by tourism. The health and well-being of our downtowns depends on revenue received from visitors to our counties. Hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, social events, dark skies, agritourism and historic/cultural tourism attract both residents and nonresidents. This economic area can be improved upon with increased marketing, hospitality efforts, and growth planning.

Table 13: Top 10 Activities for Non-residents, 2014-2016		
Rank	Activity	% who indicated participation
1	Scenic Driving	35%
2	Day Hiking	19%
3	Watching Wildlife	16%

<https://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2019-2020/EQC/Meetings/Jan-2020/scorp-2020-2024.pdf>

The EPEDC’s counties fall within “Southeast Montana.” One of six state defined tourism districts that collects bed tax revenue from visitors to reinvest in regional marketing and development. The area is rich in history and has contrasts of every kind -- contrasts in scenery, culture, entertainment and boating, water skiing, and photography opportunities.

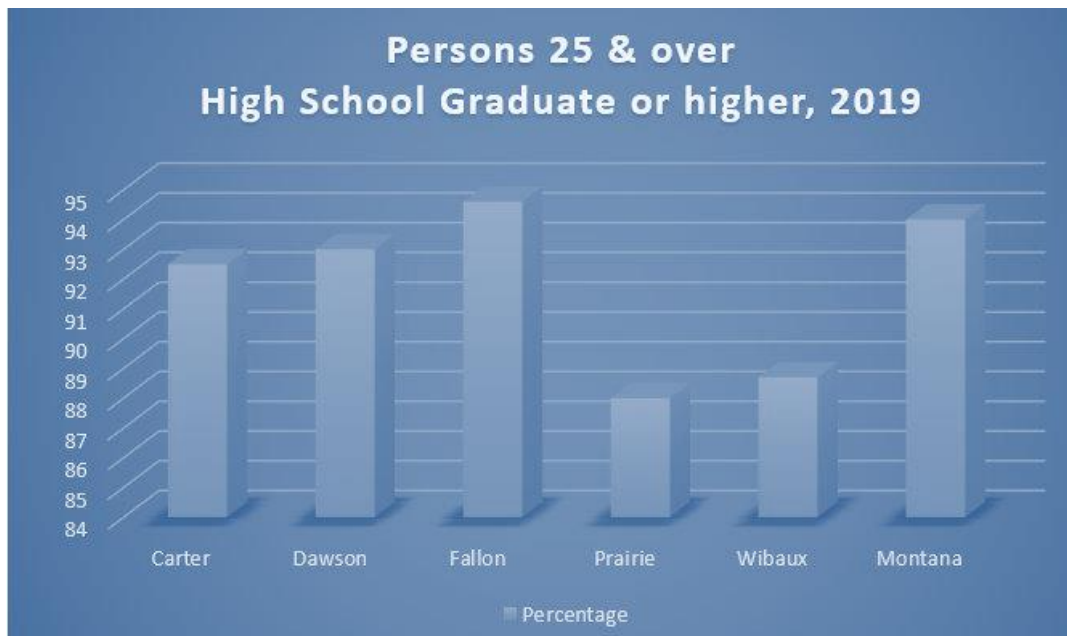


Hunting and fishing are available throughout the region. Summer events include rodeos, fairs, concerts, celebrations and ethnic affairs. There are art galleries, a rich variety of museums, horse shows and reenactments.





Education and workforce development – According to the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey’s 5-Year Estimates, the EPEDC’s percentage of persons over 25 with a high school degree or higher education averaged 91.6%. This is a slight increase from the 2011-2015 average, which was 91% for the EPEDC region, indicating a measure of consistency within the region. This also puts the EPEDC region only marginally behind the Montana average of 94%.



<https://ceic.mt.gov/People-and-Housing/Area-Profiles/Area-Profile-Map>

There is one community college in the District—Dawson Community College (DCC) in Glendive. The college is a great asset to the region and offers a wide range of transfer programs and vocational degrees along with one year certificates to meet the educational needs of eastern Montana. The college also offers workshops, short courses, adult education opportunities, and workforce development. Courses are available on campus, online, and by instructional television.



Full Time Enrolled Students from FY 2014-2022

Campus or Locale	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dawson CC	264	221	211	228	260	269	278	365	309
Total	264	221	211	228	260	269	278	365	309

Source: <https://mus.edu/data/dashboards/FTE-enrollments.html>

Housing-A lack of quality housing continues to be one of the region’s primary concerns. There is only one non-profit housing organization serving the EPEDC area—Action for Eastern Montana in Glendive. They deliver some weatherization and energy assistance programs but are also stretched to serve 18 counties in eastern Montana with limited staff.

	2010	2015	2020
Carter	810	806	822
Dawson	4168	4376	4383
Fallon	1470	1550	1570
Prairie	673	667	671
Wibaux	538	539	519
TOTAL	7659	7938	7965

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/HSG010215/30011,30>

The number of vacant homes is increasing in the region. Most often, as children leave their parents to age in place, parents die leaving vacancies that remain untended and unfilled by new occupants due to lack of property management or the dilapidated state of the housing itself. Seasonal occupants also account for a lack of available housing.

Out-of-state residents frequently own homes that are only used during the summer and fall/hunting season. While the added revenue brought by seasonal visitation is welcomed, its impact on the District’s tax base and overall housing availability at such a critical juncture in development is significant. A vast majority of the single-family homes in the District were constructed before 1959 with materials that were cost effective and available at the time, leading to the need for rehabilitation that exceeds the budgets of



both limited income seniors and first-time homebuyers. The median value of owner-occupied housing units is \$127,320 in the EPEDC region, which is considerably lower than the State of Montana’s median value of \$244,900.



<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/chart/wibauxcountymontana,prairiecountymontana,falloncountymontana,dawsoncountymontana,cartercountymontana,MT/HSG495220>

Health and Social Services –The region is served by a limited number of physicians, dentists, and pharmacists. Nearly all of MT is considered a Health Professional Shortage Area for Mental Health Professions. Access to behavioral health service in rural and frontier settings is impeded by limited availability of resources, stigma, economic issues, caregiver stress and isolation, COVID-19 pandemic and overlapping relationships in small communities. Additionally, lack of transportation, and the need to travel long distances to receive care are also issues.

One mental health facility has been constructed in Dawson County.

A regional symptom resulting from a declining population with a rising median age is roughly 1.72 deaths for every birth in 2015(Table 15).

	2020		2015	
	Births	Deaths	Births	Deaths
Carter	10	22	12	7
Dawson	89	135	130	112
Fallon	23	39	46	36
Prairie	8	20	13	15
Wibaux	9	23	11	20
MT	10,794	12,030	12,580	9,939

<https://dphhs.mt.gov/assets/publichealth/Epidemiology/VSU/VSU2020AnnualReport.pdf>



B. Geographic, Climatic, Environmental, Cultural and Natural Resource Profile

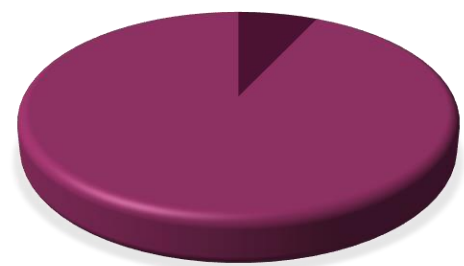
The Eastern Plains Economic Development District (EDD) encompasses the five (5) counties of Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie, and Wibaux in southeastern Montana. The area is approximately 188 miles long by 96 miles wide (at its greatest width). The eastern boundary is formed by the state borders of North and South Dakota, and the Wyoming state border forms the District's southern boundary. The area includes rolling farmland, large expanses of rangeland, rough breaks and badlands, as well as pine-covered hills. The Eastern Plains EDD covers 9,985.3 square miles or 6,390,592 surface acres. Elevations range from under 2,000 feet near the northern border of Dawson County to 4,100 feet in the forested areas of Carter County.



The EPEDC region
is **over 300**
square miles
LARGER than the
entire State of



EPEDC AS A PORTION OF
MONTANA'S TOTAL SURFACE
AREA

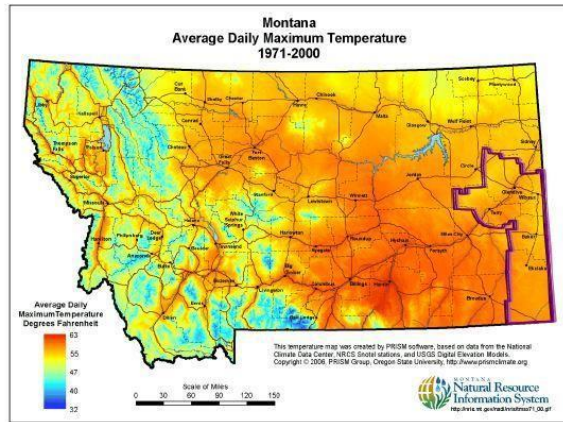
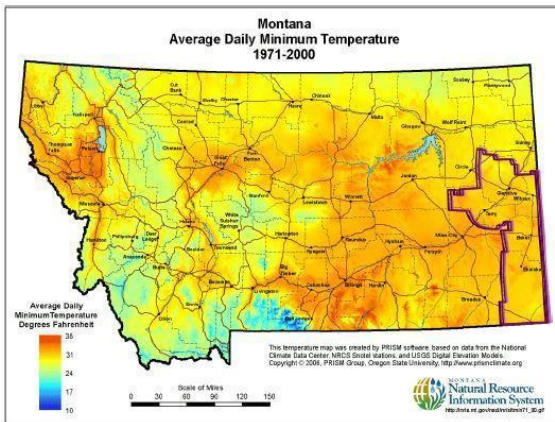


Other
Region
~ 02%



Climatic Profile

Average annual rainfall for this area of Montana ranges from 13.57 to 17.04 inches. Severe drought conditions prevailed in eastern Montana throughout the 1980s—rainfall was below average and temperatures were very high. Rainfall returned to what residents considered more normal in the 1990s; however, winters in the early 1990s were very mild. Current droughts have added strain to the regional economy. Variable to extreme climatic and windy conditions are common in eastern Montana.



Environmental Profile

This section identifies several issues which may impact economic development. Some issues may impede development, while others may provide opportunities. A balance between economic development and the environment is necessary to contribute to a high quality of life, as well as healthy tourism and recreation.

State parks include Makoshika State Park bordering the City of Glendive and Medicine Rocks State Park near Ekalaka. Lamesteer National Wildlife Refuge is located in Wibaux County. The Terry Badlands Wilderness Study Area (WSA) is 44,000 acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In addition, Custer National Forest, totaling over 1.3 million acres, covers much of southern Carter County.



Prime/Unique Agricultural Lands - The 1981 Congressional report, *Compact/Cities: Energy- Saving Strategies for the Eighties*, identified the need for Congress to implement programs and policies to protect farmland and combat urban sprawl and the waste of energy and resources that accompanies sprawling development. Congress passed the Agriculture and Food Act of 1981 containing the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA). The final rules and regulations were published in the Federal Register on June 17, 1994.

The FPPA is intended to minimize the impact Federal programs have on the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses. It assures that, to the extent possible, Federal programs are administered to be compatible with state and local units of government and private programs and policies to protect farmland. Activities that may be subject to FPPA include:

- State highway construction projects (through the Federal Highway Administration)
- Airport expansions
- Electric cooperative construction projects
- Railroad construction projects
- Federal agency projects that convert farmland
- Other projects completed with Federal assistance

Hazardous waste and toxic contamination investigation and clean up in Montana is administered by the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) under the 1989 Montana Comprehensive Environmental Cleanup and Responsibility Act (CECRA). The 1997 Legislature adopted the Controlled Allocation of Liability Act, which provides a voluntary process for the apportionment of liability at CECRA facilities and established an orphan share fund.

Currently, there are two CECRA sites identified in the Eastern Plains EDC area, both located in Glendive, Montana. They are the Burlington Northern Fueling Facility (still in operation and listed as “High Priority”) and the Dowell Schlumberger Inc. (an inactive oil field service facility and listed as “Medium Priority”). Further information on these sites is available on the DEQ website: <http://www.deq.mt.gov/StateSuperfund>. There are no sites in the Eastern Plains EDC area listed on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s National Priorities List (NPL) Sites.

The Montana DEQ maintains a list of leaking underground storage tanks in the Petroleum Release Section, Remediation Division. The list includes 12 sites in Carter County with four of those having been resolved, 85 sites in Dawson County with 44 of those listed as resolved, 23 sites in Fallon County with 14 resolved, 21 sites in Prairie County with 16 resolved, and seven sites in Wibaux County with four resolved

Floodplains– Floodplain management in Montana is administered through the Floodplain Management Program housed in the Water Resources Division of the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). This program is responsible for the overall



development and administration of two major programs and various subprograms—including the Montana Floodplain and Floodway Management Program, Community Assistance Program, Flood Mitigation Assistance Program, National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), and the Cooperative Technical Partnership Program (CTP). The program performs a variety of administrative, managerial, technical, and educational duties relative to the state and federal floodplain management programs to ensure that local governments monitor and regulate floodplain development in a manner that minimizes the loss of life and property in the event of a 100-year flood.

The Floodplain Management Section of the DNRC is responsible for the oversight and NFIP coordination of 130 locally administered floodplain management programs throughout Montana. The primary goal of the program is to reduce the loss of life and structural property through wise floodplain development. The secondary goals are to reduce the loss of functional floodplains and reduce the amount of erosion of stream banks due to unwise floodplain development. More floodplain information can be found at http://dnrc.mt.gov/wrd/water_op/floodplain/. It should be noted that neither Prairie County (Town of Terry) or Wibaux County participate in the NFIP.

The Floodplain Management Program is statutorily required to initiate a comprehensive program for the delineation of designated floodplains and designated floodways for every watercourse and drain way in the state. Currently, the only funding available to accomplish this is funding through the CTP, which are funds provided by FEMA. Unfortunately, the amount of funding can only meet 10-15% of the need for Montana. Most NFIP communities in Montana with maps have portions of their floodplain with no detailed base floodplain elevation (BFE). Lack of information coupled with floodplain regulations hinders development, since a home/building located within the 100-year floodplain has a chance of being inundated by a base flood over the life of a 30-year mortgage. The most recent disaster declaration for severe storms was granted by FEMA June 11, 2016 for the tornado that hit the City of Baker assistance for Fallon County.

Natural Resource Profile

Natural resources have been the sustaining feature of the District through the last century; these include soil, rangeland, and wildlife. Sustainable use and conservation of all natural resources is important to the area's residents. Agriculture, mining, and oil and gas production have long been the area's primary industries.

Farming and ranching are the major income producing businesses. Rainfall, energy costs, and commodity prices greatly influence the profitability of this industry

Coal mining played an important historic role in eastern Montana's development. Lignite coal-bearing deposits are found in Dawson, Fallon, and Wibaux counties. Currently, there are no coal mining activities in the region, however the impacts of the decrease in coal activity is felt throughout the region.



Oil and gas reserves development is subject to demand on the national and international market. The oil industry boomed in the area during the 1970s and early 1980s, but crashed when oil prices dropped in 1985. Oil activity in the region has typically been focused on the Cedar Creek Anticline in Prairie, Dawson, and Fallon Counties. Recently, there has been a decrease in drilling occurring near the Bakken Shale subsurface formation following the “bust” of 2015. Located in the Williston Basin in Montana and North Dakota and in the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the Bakken formation is estimated to contain approximately 3.5 to 4.0 billion barrels of oil equivalent, which makes it the largest oil find in US history outside the oil fields of Alaska. The Bakken formation extends into the EPEDC region; a rise in oil leases and test wells indicates that further drilling in eastern Montana will occur. It can be anticipated that this increase in oil production and the “fracking” of wells will provide for a significant economic impact on the entire region, however at a slower rate than experienced between 2011-2015. Responsible and sustainable development, along with impact mitigation, will be essential throughout the next several years to ensure the long- term stability of the region.

The region remains a corridor for pipeline development. Several lines already crisscross the area; infrastructure development positively affects a county’s tax base. Pipeline routes also affect agricultural producers and landowners.

Non-metallic mineral reserves of bentonite are found in the southeast portion of the area near Alzada in Carter County. Signification quantities of commercial-scale gravel deposits are available in Dawson and Prairie counties for road surface, concrete, and general construction.

Wind energy development potential exists in all five counties. Maps pinpoint areas of high potential for the generation of wind energy in all five counties. Wind monitoring stations have been constructed in the region. Tax credits and other incentives are available for the generation of wind energy and other alternative generation means. The main development obstacle remains the lack of available power transmission lines.

Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. (MDU) owns two wind farms in the region, both in Fallon County.

- Diamond Willow I (constructed in 2007-2008)/ 19.5 megawatts
- Diamond Willow II (began operation in June 2010)/ 10.5 megawatts

Timber - The timber industry in eastern Montana is located in Carter County on the Custer National Forest. Additionally, some private timber is harvested each year. The timber industry statewide and in the entire northwestern United States has faced huge cutbacks in timber harvest and lumber mill closures. The Montana Department of Natural



Resources and Conservation foresters serving these counties provide information, technical assistance and encourage responsible utilization of timber resources.

Water Resources – The area lies within the watershed of the Yellowstone River, a major tributary to the Missouri River System. This river is a very important source of municipal and irrigation water and has recreation and tourism potential. The Yellowstone River flows from the southwest in a northeasterly direction through Prairie and Dawson counties for convergence with the Missouri River just across the North Dakota border within sight of historic Fort Union. Major tributaries to the Yellowstone River in eastern Montana are the Bighorn, Powder, and Tongue Rivers and the Big Porcupine, Rosebud, Sunday, and O’Fallon Creeks.

C. Regional Infrastructure

The five counties in the Eastern Plains Economic Development District are governed by three- member county commissions, elected for 6 years on a rotating basis. Within these counties are seven incorporated cities or towns, operating under the jurisdiction of city/town councils. Five to nine council members are elected every 4 years in rotation, usually in nonpartisan elections (Table 17). A mayor is elected separately and votes only in the event of a tie. Cities and counties staff qualified law enforcement professionals. Unincorporated communities have no organized governmental structure other than that provided by the county where the city/town is located.

TABLE 17: County and Municipality Government

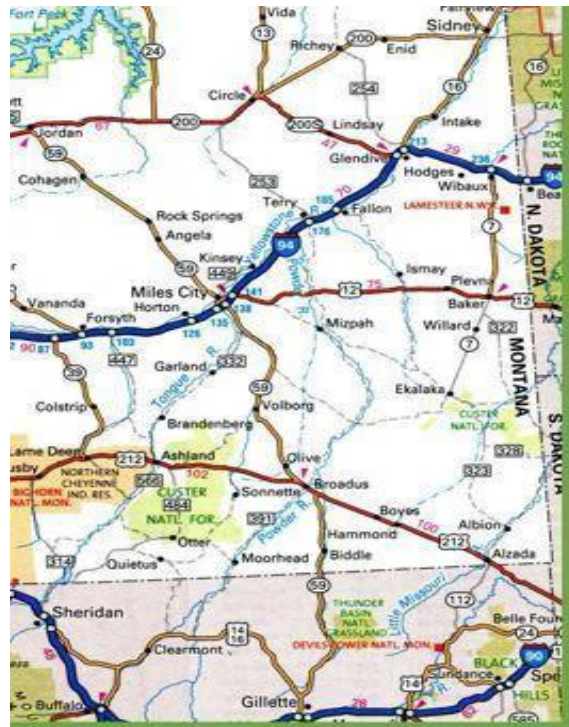
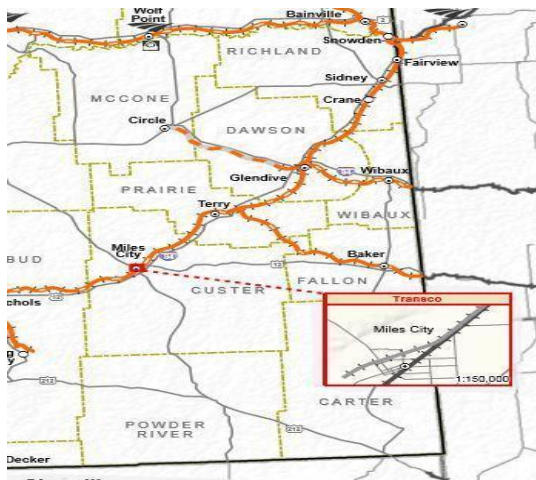
County/City/Town	Form of Government	Powers of Government	Method of Election	Size of Commission or Council
Carter	COM	Gen	P	3
Ekalaka	Com-Ex(A)	Gen	NP	5
Dawson	COM	Gen	P	3
Glendive	Com-Ex	Gen	NP	9
Richey	Com-Ex	Gen	NP	5
Fallon	COM	Gen	P	3
Baker	Com-Ex	Gen	NP	5
Plevna	Com-Ex(A)	Gen	NP	5
Prairie	COM	Gen	P	3
Terry	Com-Ex	Gen	NP	5
Wibaux	COM	Gen	P	3
Wibaux	Com-Ex	Gen	NP	5



Transportation Modes - The area has restricted surface and air transportation. A commercial airport and subsidized air service is available in Glendive. Non-commercial airports are located in Baker, Ekalaka, and Terry. Interstate 94 runs east-west across the northern part of the District through Dawson, Prairie, and Wibaux Counties. Rail freight is carried by Burlington Northern Santa Fe with spurs servicing grain elevators. Trailways bus lines travel along I-94 providing service to the communities of Terry, Glendive, and Wibaux. Limited taxi service is available in certain parts of the District. No passenger train travel is available at this time. However, there is renewed interest in restoring a passenger rail line across the southern portion of the State.

While east-west transportation is adequate, north-south travel is limited. There is no public north-south transportation, and limited paved routes occasionally leave area residents dependent on gravel roads.

Highway 261 from Wibaux to Sidney needs to be paved due to increased truck traffic transporting freight from the oil fields. Another restriction on transportation is the ability of counties to maintain roads and bridges due to a finite tax base.



<https://mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/docs/railmap.pdf>
<http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/montana/>



Water Supply and Treatment Systems - Typically, a public water supply is defined as supplying 25 or more people or 10 or more service connections daily or at least 10 service connections at least 60 days out of the calendar year. The review of community water systems in the district indicated system sources and storage volume are considered sufficient for domestic use. In addition to the domestic demand, most systems have adequate source and storage for protection from fire and have fair distribution capabilities. However, most are over 50 years old and age is taking a toll on these systems. An ongoing effort to upgrade community water supply and treatment systems is common throughout the district.

Sewage Treatment and Collection Systems - As with water systems, the majority of communities work consistently to keep their sewage facilities within the regulations required. There are nine wastewater treatment facilities in the area. Most systems are facultative lagoons and the primary problem is seepage and/or dike maintenance. All communities who have deficiencies are aware of the problems. Discharge standards are also becoming increasingly difficult to meet, and testing requirements are placing a strain on local governments.

Solid Waste Sites - Currently, the district is served by the following Class II or better landfills: Glendive and Coral Creek (Baker). All facilities are currently in compliance with regulations governing landfills. The primary concern is extending the life of the landfill and diverting bulky items taking up space. All facilities support recycling efforts; however, the market and transportation are not conducive to a widespread recycling effort. Most recycling relies on efforts of volunteers to breakeven at best. Eastern Montana Industries (EMI), a regional non-profit headquartered in Miles City, Montana collects some recyclables for the region. EMI is working toward expanding its recycling efforts further into eastern Montana and is also searching for ways to expand the types of materials it can collect. In addition, growing activity in the region due to oil and gas development may put a greater strain on existing landfills, filling them at greater rates than previously anticipated. While fees are in place for collection of waste, the long-term impacts of the additional dumping will need to be considered as activity increases.

Energy Distribution Systems – Listed below are companies that provide electricity and natural gas to consumers in the District.

Name	Office
Goldenwest Electric Cooperative Inc.	Wibaux
Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric	Sidney
McCone Electric Cooperative Inc.	Circle
Montana-Dakota Utilities Co. (MDU)	Glendive
Southeast Electric Cooperative Inc.	Ekalaka
Tongue River Electric Cooperative	Ashland

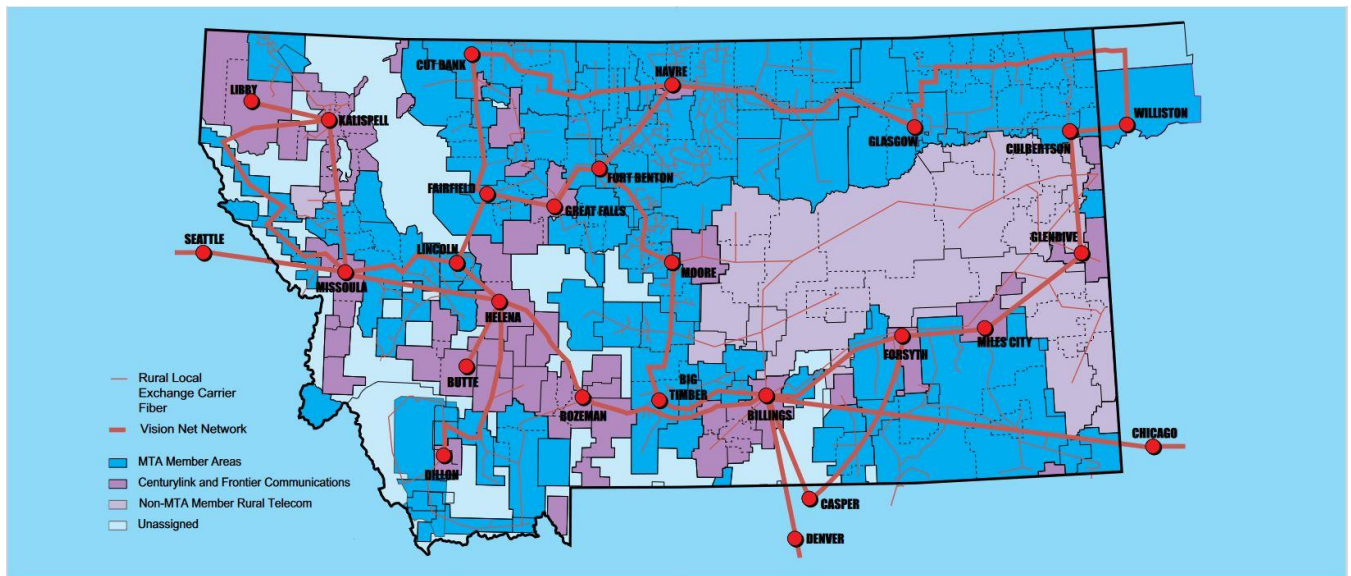


There is one power plant (83.7 kilo-watts) located south of Glendive in the EPEDC area owned by MDU Resources Group, Inc.

Communications – District residents are provided telephone service by Mid-Rivers Communications, Inc. headquartered in Circle, Montana (McCone County), and CenturyLink (formerly Qwest) headquartered in Monroe, Louisiana. Internet services are also provided by these companies. Mid-Rivers has an extensive network of fiber optics throughout the EPEDC area, making DSL and high-quality broadband and telephone service possible.

Mid-Rivers Communications, Inc. serves the largest land mass telephone cooperative in the U.S. Area residents had access to the first interactive television service (ITV) for educational and other video conferencing uses in 1990—the first ITV network in Montana. Mid-Rivers continues to make improvements and is expanding its technology infrastructure in the region, including the installation of fiber for broadband, wireless and landline phone service. For more information on broadband service within the State of Montana, please visit www.broadband.mt.gov.

Local radio stations are located in Baker and Glendive. Glendive also has a local television station (KXGN).



<https://www.broadbandmt.com/assets/docs/MTA Broadband Report 2016.pdf>



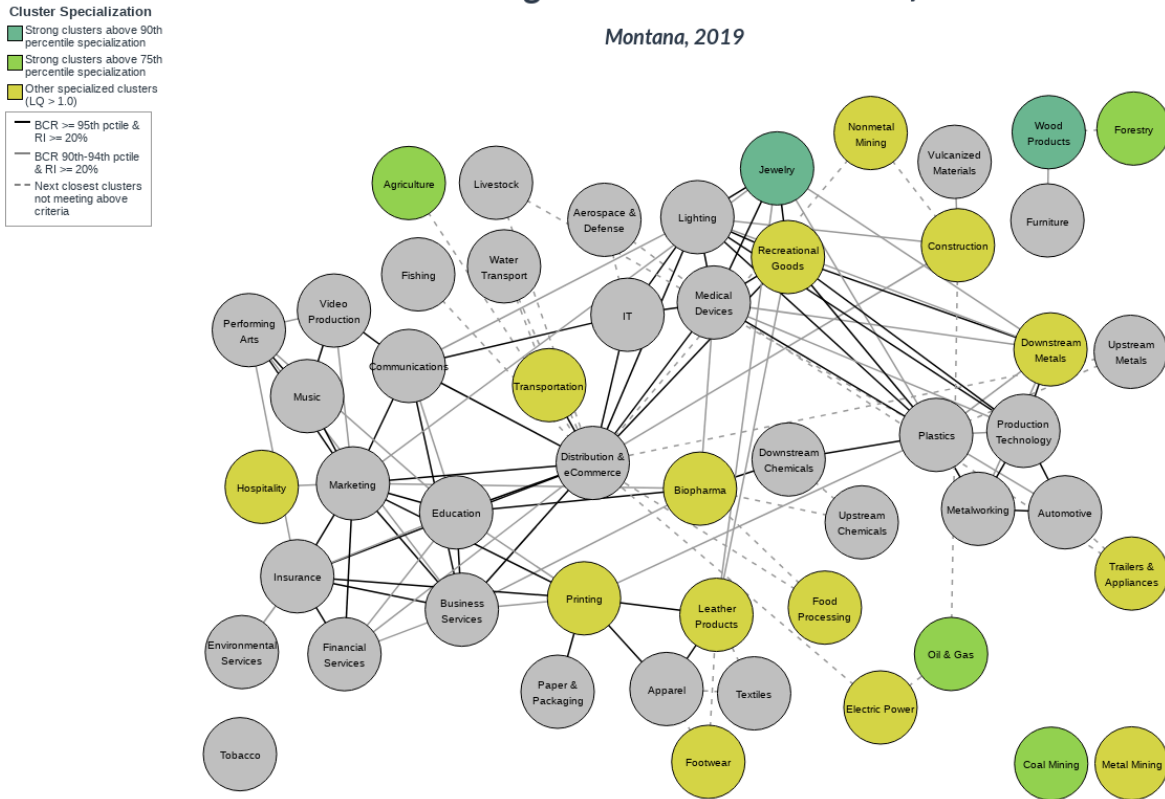
D. Emerging and Declining Clusters and Industry Sectors

The COVID-19 Global Pandemic caused unprecedented upheaval in the local, regional and global economy. Traditionally, in Montana the top Industry Clusters (excluding Agriculture) have been Business Services, Hospitality and Tourism, Distribution and Electronic Commerce, Transportation and Logistics and Oil and Gas Production and Transportation. Throughout the EPEDC region emerging clusters seem to indicate growth in local health services, local hospitality and real estate, construction and development. There has been a consistent focus on developing regional tourism and providing increased hospitality and visitor services.

<https://clustermapping.us/region/state/montana/cluster-portfolio>

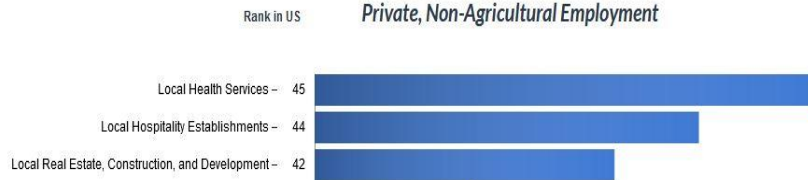
Cluster Linkages and Economic Diversification

Montana, 2019



Montana

Employment by Local Cluster, 2019
Private, Non-Agricultural Employment





SWOT ANALYSIS SUMMARY

STRENGTHS				
Economy	Workforce	Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Tourism
Agricultural base	Work Ethic	Basic community infrastructure is in place	Open space	Friendly people
Improved tax base, due to natural resource development	Occupation Opportunities	Education system	Good water	Quality of life
Affordable & safe place to live	Commitment to Place	Transportation access—roads, airports, rail service	Current mining—gravel, bentonite, etc.	Proximity to a variety of attractions
Few local regulations	Training Availabilities	Medical facilities	Hunting and fishing	Historical, geological, and cultural assets
Location/ Space for growth	Diverse Knowledge Base	Federal and State Funding Investments	Badlands and parks	Not overcrowded
Low unemployment	Workforce Resources		Oil and Natural Gas industry	Flexible Business Models and Opportunities
Volunteerism			Yellowstone River	Partnership with Visit SEMT
Inter-local cooperation			Renewable and Nonrenewable Energy Resources	Access to outdoor recreation
Low population density			Access to Public Land	Access to interstate and highways



Educational opportunities				
Sweat Equity				
Local Investment				
Local Investment and energy				



WEAKNESSES				
Economy	Workforce	Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Tourism
Lack of diversity	Lack of Soft Skills	Lack of mass transit	Prevalence of public lands	Lack of entertainment
Low population	Low Wages	Expensive road maintenance	Difficult Climate	Lack of tourist-related infrastructure
Reduced tax base for towns/cities	Lack of Childcare Availability	Inconsistent cell and broadband	Regulations	Lack of awareness of tourism opportunities
Floodplain	Distance for Commute	Aging municipal infrastructure	Floodplains	Inconsistent messaging and education
Aging population	Retention	Remote Location	Lack initial investment for improvement of public lands	Lack of signage to tourism destinations
Limited financial resources	Lack of Housing Availability	Cost of Materials and Supplies		
Lack of broad community involvement/apathy		Tax base and Tax Structure		
Chronically unemployed		Ability to tax/ decreased tax base		
Lack of trade workers and general contractors				
Employee Recruitment				
Employee Retention				



OPPORTUNITIES

Economy	Workforce	Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Tourism
Educate local residents and newcomers about community strengths	Remote Work	Refurbish county/town/city buildings	Develop, produce, and distribute natural resources	Advertise historic assets and outdoor recreation opportunities
Expand educational opportunities	Employee Market	Improve broadband service	Encourage pipeline development	Involve youth
Promote value-added ag and other agriculture development	Attract private investment	Coordinate road improvements with oil and gas development companies	Develop Irrigation	Tourism Center Collaboration
Encourage diversity and small business start-ups	Focus on technical/trade skills	Federal Funding		Agritourism
Emphasize Regional Centrality		Job Creation		Emphasis on Lower Yellowstone River
Expansion of Current businesses				Biking Tourism
Cooperative development				Recreation Rentals
Regional collaboration				Regional/ Multi-State Partnerships
				Astro tourism



THREATS

Economy	Workforce	Infrastructure	Natural Resources	Tourism
State and federal regulations	Jobs leaving due to remote work	Capacity/failure	Environmental risks	Lack of infrastructure
Increased cost of living impact on current residents	Rising Cost of Living	Dependency on Federal and State Resources	Public land restrictions	Liability
Boom to bust	Aging Population	Rising Costs	Health and safety risks	Gas Prices and Inflation
Perceptions/fears		Coal Tax Depleting	New Regulation	Outsider Influence
Lack of development due to property ownership		Increased Regulation	Climate Change	Regional Competition
Loss of agricultural base				
Crime				
Lack of succession planning				
Increasing Inflation				
Shrinking Taxbase				
Misinformation				
Lack of Competition				



Action Plan

Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) envisions a strong coalition of communities and counties with diversified industries supporting thriving commercial centers, all the while maintaining a traditional, rural, **high-quality** lifestyle. The mission of the Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation is to maintain, diversify, and improve economic conditions by fostering cooperation and communication between public and private entities in Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie, and Wibaux Counties.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The EPEDC's regional goals and objectives are designed to be flexible enough to evolve and reflect new directions and opportunities as they are identified. Regional goals were categorized under the following categories: Economy, Workforce, Infrastructure, Natural Resources, and Tourism.

Services that the EPEDC will provide in support of the vision, mission, goals, and objectives include:

- Provide services of the Montana Department of Commerce designated Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC) for the five-county area
- Provide grant writing and grant administrative services to businesses, individuals, and communities in the service area
- Provide educational and information opportunities and efforts on economic and community development
- Provide access to revolving loan funds for the members of the Eastern Plains EDC
- Provide financial and technical assistance to businesses, individuals, and communities in the service area from the Small Business Development Center and Food and Agriculture Development Centers.
- Coordinate and collaborate with other regional and local development organizations
- Support local, State, and Federal programs and policies that benefit the EPEDC region



Economy

Goal 1: Manage economic growth and attain diversity in the five-county region through job retention and new job creation, thus creating an economic environment conducive for investment, capital formation, and capital access

Objective A: Diversify, stabilize, and strengthen the regional economy with business retention, development, and expansion

Strategies:

1. Assist the region with all aspects related to industrial development
2. Seek public and private partnerships for entrepreneurs, small and mid-sized businesses, and manufacturers with the Montana Cooperative Development Center, Montana Manufacturing Extension Center, Montana Department of Commerce, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, United States Department of Agriculture, and the Economic Development Administration for technical assistance, financing, and legal counseling
3. Explore and create partnership(s) with any private/public sector group(s) if it would help minimize duplication of time, effort, and money
4. Improve communication among the different regional governments and economic development groups
5. Improve the ability and capacity of the EPEDC to acquire information and funding resources for regional business, community, and public leaders that will help create new jobs and generate private investments
6. Collaborate Miles Community College's Small Business Development Center (SBDC), providing free and confidential business counseling.
7. Assist Counties and communities with planning necessary to ensure the successful implementation of any proposed developments
8. Assist with coordination and cooperation between industrial developers and communities/counties
9. Work to promote, develop, and retain agriculture and agriculture related businesses in the Region
10. Promote existing Revolving Loan Funds as effective tools for business development, retention, and expansion
11. Create an entrepreneurial ecosystem to support growth, development and resiliency



Workforce

Goal II: Encourage the development of workforce opportunities for various needs and incomes

Objective A: Evaluate and assist with development of workforce opportunities demands of the region

Strategies

1. Preserve and create jobs while building and maintaining a skilled workforce
2. To meet the skill-needs of existing and emerging regional employers, high growth occupations, and under-skilled participants;
3. To continue to develop and refine innovative service delivery strategies for the region
4. To advance participants through progressive levels of education and training as efficiently as possible, gaining education and workforce skills of measurable value at each level, and ensuring all levels of education and training are closely aligned with jobs and industry customers that are a part of the regional economy.
5. Create effective partnerships with regional organizations that are currently active in the workforce sector
6. Help locate and secure funding for training and education

Infrastructure

Goal III: Assist with identifying financing options for the development of both private and public sector infrastructure projects to support potential economic growth and maintain quality of life throughout the region

Objective A: Assist public sector entities with the maintenance, replacement, or construction of basic infrastructure needs and evaluate potential development impacts

Strategies:

1. Assist the region with financing evaluation and options--including grants and/or low-interest loans from Federal, state, local, corporate/ private foundations--to maintain, replace, and upgrade basic health and safety quality-of-life items like water, wastewater, storm water, street, highway, bridges, broadband and landfills in the region
2. Help the region address the need for city/county planners
3. Assist counties and municipalities address handicapped access issues to public facilities to encourage equity for all users
4. Help counties address rural county road improvements
5. Promote improved broadband service throughout the region
6. Assist municipalities address the need for paved streets, public restroom and pools, and underground sprinkler systems for schools and parks
7. Address health care issues by helping public facilities identify and fund needed improvements



8. Assist counties and communities with the development of essential planning documents
9. Assist the counties and communities communicate issues related to regulations that impact development, local services, and community well-being

Objective B: Assist private sector entities address infrastructure maintenance, replacement, or construction of basic infrastructure needs

1. Address health care issues by helping private facilities identify and fund needed improvements
2. Assist with community/senior center needs including housing and assisted living facilities
3. Support community leadership and develop funding resources to assist with improvements and maintenance, via programs such as Montana Main Street
4. Support Infrastructure access and expansion for private industry

Natural Resources

Goal IV: Advocate and assist in the evaluation, creation, and implementation of responsible natural resource development and environmentally sustainable development

Objective A: Evaluate and promote value-added energy and natural resource business opportunities throughout the region

Strategies:

1. Promote energy development and environmentally sustainable development within the region
2. Promote cooperation and alliances for development of all energy sources for regional resiliency—oil, gas, coal, wind, ethanol, geothermal, etc.
3. Preserve and promote existing natural resource production and use, such as gravel, bentonite, scoria, etc.
4. Work with local extension service representatives, universities and colleges, MT Department of Natural Resources, and local conservation and grazing districts to advocate responsible natural resource development and promote value-added agricultural products
5. Assist with water improvements—bodies of water, waterways, water supplies, irrigation etc.



Tourism

Goal V: Strengthen and promote area tourism

Objective A: Develop partnerships with federal, state, county, and local governments, agencies, local organizations and private businesses to promote and maintain recreational opportunities

Strategies:

1. Promote and support all parks within the Eastern Plains EDC region—Makoshika State Park, Medicine Rocks State Park, Custer National Forest, etc.
2. Support local chambers of commerce and the Southeast MT Tourism region in their endeavors to improve tourist traffic to eastern MT
3. Pursue funding to aid with downtown community planning and beautification
4. Support and pursue activities that promote the Eastern Plains EDC region's proximity to other regional attractions—Black Hills/Sturgis/Mount Rushmore, Medora, Billings, etc.
5. Support Outdoor recreation opportunities as an emerging industry in the region

Setting Priorities

Public meetings were held in each of the five counties. Meetings were held in Ekalaka for Carter County on February 8, 2021, and December 1, 2021, December 9, 2021 and March 8, 2022; in Glendive for Dawson County on December 14, 2021, January 25, 2022, February 9, 2022 and March 7, 2022; in Baker on March 8, 2022 and March 9, 2022 and Plevna March 14, 2022 for Fallon County January 5, 2022; in Terry for Prairie County on December 20, 2021 and March 10, 2022; and in Wibaux for Wibaux County on December 13, 2021, January 20, 2022 and March 10, 2022.

It is based on the Goals and Objectives determined at those public meetings that the Action Plan was confirmed.



Prioritization of Projects and Activities

Economy					
Goal I: Manage economic growth and attain diversity in the five-county region through job retention and new job creation, thus creating an economic environment conducive for investment, capital formation, and capital access					
Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S = Set-Date O = Ongoing
Objective A: Diversify, stabilize, and strengthen the regional economy with business retention, development, and expansion					
Business expansion and retention	1	H	SBDC	SEMDC, EPEDC, GNDC, local development organizations, BEAR	0
Regional oil and gas related business development	1	H	Private sector	EPEDC, SBDC, SEMDC, RED, GNDC, LDO's, towns/cities, counties	0
Dawson County Farm-to-Table/commercial kitchen	2	L	Community GATE	MSU Extension Service, EPEDC, USDA, MT Dept of Ag	0
Industrial development	1	H	Towns/cities and counties	Private sector, EPEDC, MT DOC, LDO's	0
RLF development	1	H	EPEDC	SEMDC, GNDC, RED, USDA, EDA, MT DOC, DNRC	0
Local planning	1	H	EPEDC	EDA, SEMDC, RED, GNDC, MT DOC	0
New business start-ups	1	H	Private sector	SBDC, EPEDC, SEMDC, LDO's	0
Business succession planning	1	M	EPEDC	MSU Extension Service	0
Baker Commercial Development	3	H	Private Sector	SBDC, EPEDC, MSU Extension Service	0
Broadband development and expansion	1	H	Local co-ops	EPEDC, MT Broadband Program, MT DOA	0
Downtown Development	3	H	Towns/cities	Private sector, EPEDC, MT DOC, LDO's	0



Housing

Goal II: Encourage the development of housing for various needs and incomes

Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S= Set-Date O = Ongoing
Objective A: Evaluate and assist with development of elderly and assisted-living facilities in the region					
Senior citizen/transitional housing	1	M	EPEDC	Private sector, towns/cities, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Assisted living facilities	2	M	EPEDC	Private sector, towns/cities, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Objective B: Assist small communities develop affordable and available housing opportunities for the region's workforce					
Carter County housing shortage	3	H	EPEDC	Private sector, towns, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Dawson County housing shortage	3	L	EPEDC	Private sector, towns/city, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Fallon County housing shortage	3	H	EPEDC	Private sector, town/city, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Prairie County housing shortage	3	H	EPEDC	Private sector, town, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Wibaux County housing shortage	3	H	EPEDC	Private sector, town, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Housing rehabilitation	2	M	Towns/cities and counties	Action for Eastern MT, private sector, towns/cities, MBOH, counties, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0
Middle Stock Housing Shortage	1	M	EPEDC	Private sector, towns, county, MBOH, MT DOC, USDA/RD	0



Infrastructure

Goal III: Assist with identifying financing options for the development of both private and public sector infrastructure projects to support potential economic growth and maintain quality of life throughout the region

Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S= Set-Date O = Ongoing
Objective A: Assist public sector entities with the maintenance, replacement, or construction of basic infrastructure needs and evaluate potential development impacts					
Rural county road improvement	1	H	Counties	MT DOT, EPEDC, private sector	O
Street paving	1	H	Town	County, EPEDC, MT DOT, private sector	O
Ekalaka streets and sidewalks	3	M	Town	County, EPEDC, MT DOT, private sector	O
Terry pool	3	H	Town	County, EPEDC, private sector	2023
Ekalaka pool	3	H	Town	County, EPEDC, private sector	2023
Terry Sewer	3	H	Town	EPEDC, TSEP, DNRC, ACOE	2023
Dawson and Wibaux County floodplain mitigation and/or levee	2	H	Town/city and counties	ACOE, EPEDC	O
Glendive/Dawson County sewer and water	3	H	City/county	EPEDC, MT DOC, ACOE, DEQ, SRF, DNRC	2024
Plevna water system	3	H	Town/county	EPEDC, DEQ, MT DOC, DNRC, SRF	2024
Emergency services	1	H	Counties	EPEDC, Homeland Security/DES	O
Ekalaka Fire Hall	3	M	City	EPEDC, USDA/RD	O
County equipment and facility upgrades	1	H	Counties	EPEDC, USDA/RD	O
Richey Water and Sewer	1	H	Richey	EPEDC, TSEP, DNRC,	2025
Baker water and sewer	3	H	City/county	EPEDC, MT DOC	O



Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M =Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S= Set-Date O = Ongoing
Ekalaka water, sewer, and solid waste/recycling	3	H	Town/county	EPEDC, DEQ, MT DOC, ACOE, SRF, DNRC	0
Terry water	3	H	Town	County, EPEDC, MT DOC, USDA/RD, ACOE, DNRC	0
Milwaukee Bridge Rehabilitation and resurfacing	3	H	County	FLAP, MT DOC, EPEDC	2024
Bridge Rehabilitation and Resurfacing	1	H	Counties	MT DOC, EPEDC	0
Richey Senior Center	3	H	County	EPEDC, County, EMBC	2025
Uran Center	3	M	County/City	EPEDC, USDA RD	0
Wibaux Senior Center	3	H	County	EPEDC, USDA RD	2023
Wibaux Library	3	H	County	EPEDC, EMBC, USDA RD	0
Wibaux Sewer	3	H	City	EPEDC, DNRC, MT COC	2023
School Infrastructure	3	H	Local School	School, County, EPEDC, OPI	0
Merrill Avenue Sidewalk Extension	1	H	City of Glendive	Town, County, MDT, EPEDC	2024



Infrastructure

Objective B: Assist private sector entities address infrastructure maintenance, replacement, or construction of basic infrastructure needs

Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline Set-Date 0 = Ongoing
Brownfield assessment and redevelopment	1	H	Eastern MT Brownfield Coalition	EPEDC, SEMDC, GNDC, private sector, chambers of commerce, local development organizations	0
Handicapped accessibility	1	M	Towns/counties	EPEDC, MT DOC, private sector, local development organizations	0
Infrastructure extensions to new and existing development	2	H	Towns/counties	EPEDC, private sector, ACOE, MT DOC, local development organizations	0



Natural Resources

Goal IV: Advocate and assist in the evaluation, creation, and implementation of responsible natural resource development

Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S = Set O = Ongoing
Objective A: Evaluate and promote value-added energy and natural resource business opportunities throughout the region					
Value-added agriculture promotion	1	H	MSU Extension Service	EPEDC, USDA, Community GATE, counties	O
Alternative energy source promotion	1	M	Counties	EPEDC, local co-ops, private sector	O
Resource development and/or distribution	1	H	Counties	EPEDC, towns/cities, private sector, local development organizations	O
Baker Lake overflow control and enhancement	3	H	City/county	EPEDC, FWP, EPA, ACOE, FEMA	2023
Current mining and asset promotion/protection	1	H	Counties	EPEDC, DEQ	O
Recreational opportunity preservation	1	M	Counties	EPEDC, FWP	O



Tourism

Goal V: Strengthen, promote, and encourage unification among communities in the region to work together to promote area tourism

Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S = Set O = Ongoing
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Objective A: Develop partnerships with federal, state, county, and local governments and agencies to promote and maintain recreational opportunities

Makoshika State Park	3	M	FWP	EPEDC, DCEDC, MT DOC	O
Dinosaur Trail	2	M	MT DOC	EPEDC, local development organizations	O
Regional/local geotourism	1	H	Local Development organizations	MT Wilderness Assoc., Chambers of Commerce, EPEDC, SEMDC, SE MT Tourism, BLM	O
Medicine Rocks State Park	3	M	FWP	Counties, EPEDC, MT DOC	O
MT Main Street Downtown Development	1	H	Towns/Cities/Chambers	Local development organizations, EPEDC, MT DOC	O
Fairground Improvements	1	H	Counties	EPEDC, County	O

Objective B: Promote partnerships to develop and maintain local recreational opportunities

Evelyn Cameron Heritage Center	3	H	ECH	EPEDC, MT DOC, private sector, MT Historical Society	O
Wibaux walking trail	3	M	Town/county	EPEDC, private sector	2026
Terry Badlands	3	H	PCEDC	MT Wilderness Association, EPEDC, private sector, county	O
Yellowstone River access and hiking trails in Dawson and Prairie Counties	2	M	Counties	DCEDC, PCEDC, private sector, BLM, FWP, EPEDC	O



Project	Regional Impact 1 = All counties 2 = More than one county 3 = One county	Priority H = High M = Medium L = Low	Lead Agency	Partners	Timeline S = Set O = Ongoing
Wibaux museum expansion and recreation area	3	M	Wibaux County	Museum board, EPEDC, MT DOC	O
Carter County museum upgrades	3	M	Carter County	Museum board, EPEDC, MT DOC	O
Regional Promotional Videos	1	M	Counties	SE MT Tourism, EPEDC, MT DOC	O
Special Events	1	M	Towns/Cities and Counties	Chambers of Commerce, EPEDC, local development organizations, SE MT Tourism, MT DOC	O
RV Dump Station	1	M	Private Business and Dawson County	USDA, EPEDC, Dawson County	O



Evaluation

Our organizational performance is continually evaluated by the numerous state and federal agencies that have entrusted our District with performance responsibilities relative to the proper management of their specific programs. These evaluations include, but are not limited to, financial reviews, regularly scheduled reporting obligations, and frequent communication with the respective agencies. As a matter of course, the Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors is responsible for evaluating and reporting CEDS “Action Plan” progress. The Board will continue to comply with all EDA reporting requirements.

Our District’s effectiveness is also evaluated on an ongoing basis by our Board of Directors and CEDS committee via staff communication on the progress of current projects. Project updates occur through such means as our Board of Directors meetings, personal contacts, meetings of member entities, EPEDC’s newsletters, as well as the EDA Annual Report and CEDS update.

The status of activities and progress on objectives, including achievement of goals, will be reviewed at each quarterly Board of Directors meeting. A chart detailing “Accomplishment List” to date is available. While activity will be ongoing, the evaluation of progress will be done at the Board of Directors meetings.

Performance Measures

Performance measures will be tied directly to the long-term economic development goals as previously identified in this document. The following criteria will be used to measure our performance as an Economic Development District (EDD).

- **The level and frequency of participation by government, business, and community leaders in projects, including Board and CEDS committee meetings.**
- **The level at which we comply with all EDA Planning and Technical Assistance grant awards and administrative conditions.**
- **The level and frequency to which District staff interacts with communities in the region to provide assistance towards identified infrastructure deficiencies.**
- **The level at which we meet the criteria established by the Montanan Department of Commerce’s Certified Regional Development Corporation Program.**
- **Number of jobs created or retained per project.**
- **The amount and types of funding leveraged per project.**



Evaluation of Regional Economy

The well-being of rural America depends on the availability of good-paying jobs, access to critical services, strong communities, and a healthy natural environment. This section contains a narrative analysis of the region's strengths and potential constraints on its growth and development. The strengths and weaknesses were examined and are presented as seen by local residents and voiced at public meetings held throughout the district in preparation for this CEDS.

The Eastern Plains Economic Development region is based in agriculture, and it continues to be the backbone of the economy. The recent COVID-19 Pandemic created unprecedented upheaval in the previously relatively stable commodity and cattle prices over the last few years.

The natural resources industry has bolted to the forefront of the region's economy over the past decade. Development of the Bakken Shale oil field in northeastern Montana and western North Dakota has erupted and then declined, putting the EPEDC region on the edge of an unprecedented oil boom and difficult bust. While this provided for great opportunities to revitalize many sectors of the economy, it also put strain on vital infrastructure and housing.

Tourism is also a vital industry in the region for local businesses and is dependent upon both outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hunting and fishing, hiking, biking and kayaking, as well as cultural assets like museums and scenic areas. Tourism activity has been on the upswing over the past few years. New motels have been constructed in Glendive and Baker. There has been a great push driven by community members for improvements at Makoshika State Park.

Our recent history has shown a population decline and outmigration of youth. Increased natural resource development provides an opportunity for youth to remain in the region and secure high wage employment, an opportunity that was previously not present. Time will tell, but a reduction in outmigration, an increase in our youth population, and a decrease in the overall age of the region's population is essential as the economy moves forward. Opportunities for young families need to be developed, as we develop ways to care for those who are aging.

Infrastructure and housing are also key to the region's ability to take advantage of the natural resource development occurring. The existing infrastructure is in many cases undersized or at capacity and needs to be expanded to allow for growth. In addition, much of the housing stock in the region is aging and availability of housing is a significant issue. Development of infrastructure and housing are crucial to the sustainability of the region long term.



Constraints on Economic Growth

The problems listed here have been identified as pertinent to economic developers in both the private and public sectors (see *SWOT Analysis Summary*). Most of these constraints are beyond the ability of the District to influence directly. They are listed here to emphasize hurdles that must be factored into any development strategy within the District so as to add some reality to possible development plans or scenarios.

1. Insufficient/aging infrastructure

The Eastern Plains EDC region has multiple issues with existing infrastructure. Water, wastewater, streets, roads, and public safety are all concerns.

Each municipality within the EPEDC region is unique, but in many instances existing infrastructure is aged enough to warrant replacement. For water, it may be distribution lines, need for additional wells, additional treatment capacity, fire protection or the lack of a municipal system altogether. For wastewater, treatment is a growing concern, and collection lines are also at issue. The amount of funding needed to upgrade and expand these facilities to meet existing and growing demand far exceeds the local capability for financing.

Streets and roads both in the counties and municipalities are of grave concern. Increased heavy traffic on county roads is causing significant damage in some areas. The municipalities struggle with street maintenance on a never-ending basis with the cost of improvements far exceeding the available budget. This often leads to year after year of patchwork repairs.

The region's ability to plan for and provide infrastructure will be the number one determinate of each community's ability to capitalize on economic activity and sustain itself into the future.

2. Low population

Between 2000 and 2020, total population in the District declined by .6%. The average median age of residents was 44.8 in 2020 compared to 47.8 in 2010, 43 years in 2000. The declining, aging population has depleted the available workforce. This trend has a ripple effect as a lack of critical mass does not encourage adequate training for available workforce, nor does it provide opportunities for advancement necessary to encourage growth. Moreover, both federal and state funding sources often advertise grants and loans as specific opportunities for rural communities. These funding sources, while aimed at assisting areas under certain population levels, also make assumptions about the amount of match a community can provide to leverage other funds. Since the EPEDC region's population is more accurately defined as frontier, with six or fewer people per square mile resulting in a finite tax base from which to draw, it can be difficult—if not impossible—to meet even the smallest grant/loan match requirements. Consequently, this seemingly small distinction limits opportunities for funding even further. The long-term implications of the age shift will mean a dramatic change in the way that Montanans live, from employment and health care to housing and transportation.



3. Attitudes

Southeastern Montana is perceived as not being competitive in the job market. The perception, or reality, that infrastructure is lacking and wages are low, coupled with a long-term decline in population, has made it difficult for the region to reverse many of its negative trends. The attitude of those living in the region is changing. Communities are updating or developing long range plans, looking at infrastructure upgrades, and encouraging development in a responsible manner. In short, the prevailing attitude of pessimism is transforming into one of hope and excitement with a little bit of trepidation, because with growth comes change and change can be difficult.

4. Non-diversified economy

Southeastern Montana's economy has been based on the production of agriculture commodities for generations. Traditionally those products have included cattle, sheep, corn and wheat grains, and sugarbeets, a majority of which leave Montana for value-adding or export. As production methods became more efficient and farms expanded, young people left the District to find educational and employment opportunities elsewhere.

With the reduction of labor in agricultural production and new efficiencies in business, job opportunities did not exist for those wishing to improve their station in life. Oil development has offered the region a chance to begin reversing that trend. New jobs are attracting younger workers and families and competition for employees in the area is growing, which will raise wages in all sectors.

Moreover, there has been a positive change recently in the attitudes of the agricultural community. Irrigated areas have increased with the use of sprinkler systems in on former dryland. Farmers are experimenting with beans, lentils, potatoes, onions, and oil seed crops. Ranchers who normally sold calves directly from their mother's side are beginning to experiment with retained ownership.



Assets of Southeastern Montana

1. Location

The EPEDC is located along the borders of three other states and is intersected by I-94. A primary route running north and south through Carter County is now paved and experiencing increased truck traffic as oil development increases production and the need to transport materials. Able to offer space and basic infrastructure, the EPEDC region is poised to grow with the proper planning and funding.

In addition, the EPEDC region is famous for its badlands, open skies, river access, unique fishing opportunities, and historical significance in the story of the “West.” The District’s proximity to a wealth of experiences and cultural resources is unprecedented, since the District sits within a day’s drive of the Black Hills in South Dakota, Medora in North Dakota, Montana’s largest metropolitan area, and Canada.

2. Communities

Strong rural communities are an asset of southeastern Montana. Basic community infrastructure—including medical facilities, schools, shops, and roads—creates a framework for further development. Communities can also claim relatively low crime rates, active volunteers, and family values with a common-sense approach to life as sources of pride in the District.

3. Tourism

Tourism potential includes capitalizing on available hunting, recreation, dinosaur digs, working ranches, camping, historic sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Dinosaur Trail, and special events. Marketing and branding efforts undertaken by Southeast Montana, the region’s state defined tourism district, have improved the EPEDC’s exposure to visitors. Localized community development and revitalization throughout the district has included neighborhood beautification, downtown improvements, and increased accessibility. Communities are discovering their niches in the tourism market. Moreover, communities are also beginning to embrace social media and technology as ways to attract a wide variety of tourists, from historians and birdwatchers to hikers and photographers.

4. Agriculture

An abundance of high quality raw agricultural products such as wheat, barley, corn, oil seed crops, beef cattle and sheep and meat processing are assets that provide an opportunity for development in the District. A wealth of opportunities for value-added agriculture entrepreneurs exists.

5. Natural resources

Natural resource availability and development over the next several years will play the most significant role in the region’s economy. Natural resource extraction is already having impacts on the economy’s service industry development, lodging, and housing



market. In addition, the region has significant coal resources although no new development is proposed at this time.

Furthermore, the region is home to a portion of the Yellowstone River, great hunting and fishing, state parks, and beautiful scenery. Both the natural resources for outdoor enthusiasts and the natural resources for industry development represent regional strengths.

6. Environment

The region's unspoiled environment, clean air, and abundance of water, wind, sun, space, and wildlife are often touted as strengths.



Appendices

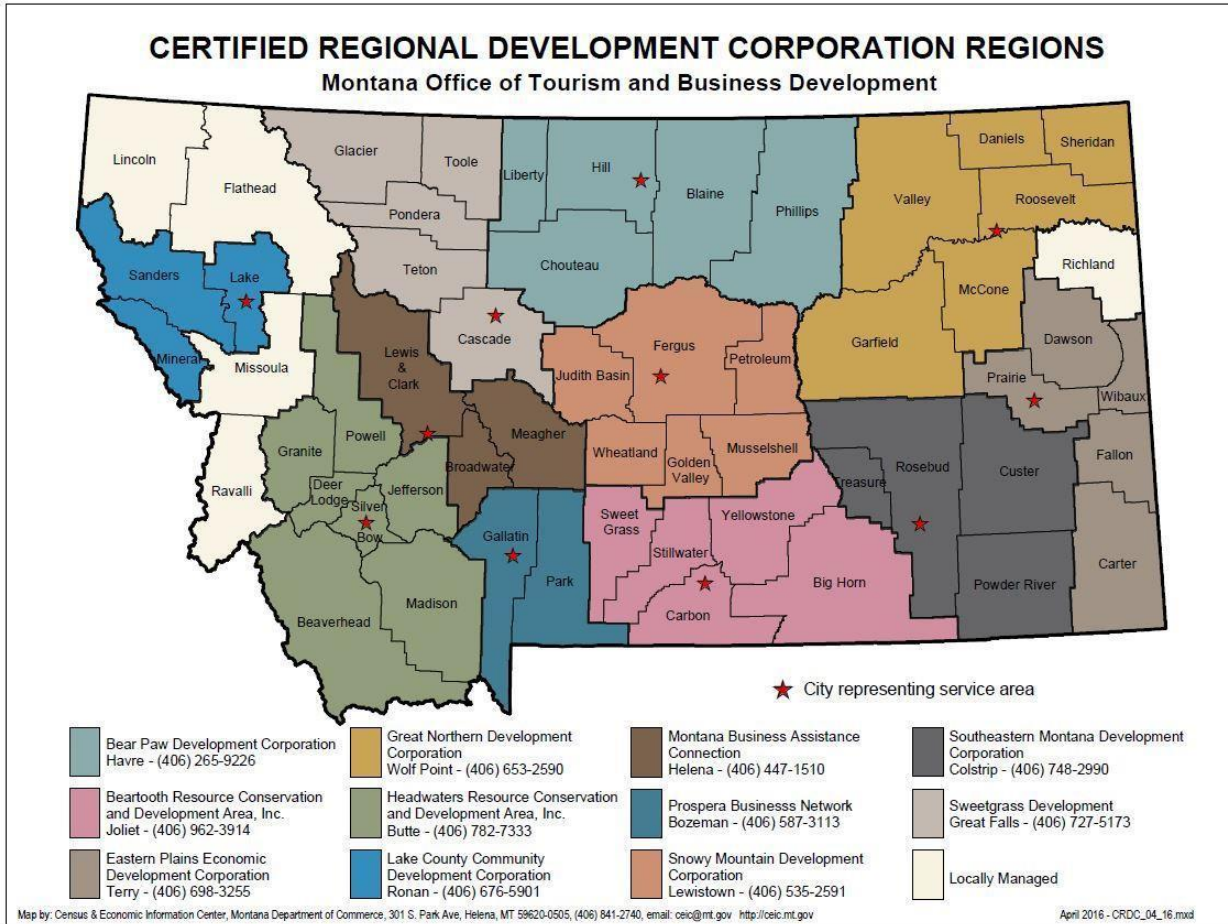
Appendix A:
Certified Regional Development Corporation Regions

Appendix B:
Master List of Acronyms and Terms

Appendix C:
Eastern Plains Economic Development Resiliency Strategies



Appendix A





Appendix B

BEAR – Business Expansion and Retention
BFE – base flood elevation
BLM – Bureau of Land Management
CECRA – Comprehensive Environmental Cleanup and Responsibility Act
CEDS – Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
CLF – civilian labor force
CRDC – Certified Regional Development Corporation
CTP – Cooperative Technical Partnership Program
DCC – Dawson Community College
DCEDC – Dawson County Economic Development Council
DEQ – Department of Environmental Quality
DNRC – Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
EDA – Economic Development Administration
EDD – Economic Development District
EMBC – Eastern Montana Brownfield Coalition
EMI – Eastern Montana Industries
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
EPEDC – Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation
FTE – Full-time Enrollee
FWP – Fish Wildlife and Parks
GNDC – Great Northern Development Corporation
ITRR – Institute for Tourism and Recreation
Research ITV – interactive television
LDOs – local development organizations
MCA – Montana Code Annotated
MDU – Montana-Dakota Utilities
NFIP – National Flood Insurance Program
NPL – National Priorities List (as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
PCEDC – Prairie County Economic Development Council
RED – Richland Economic Development
SBDC – Small Business Development
Center
SEMDC – Southeastern Montana Economic Development Corporation
SMART – Southeastern Montana Area Revitalization Team
SRF – State Revolving Fund
WSA – Wilderness Study Area