Chouteau County Growth Policy

Updated

2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

OVERVIEW

When Lewis and Clark first recorded the magnificence of the White Cliffs along the Missouri River, they likely did not foresee that this point in their journey would be the launching grounds for much of the westward expansion that was to follow. Chouteau County is known as the birthplace of modern Montana. Fort Benton, the county seat, is the oldest permanent settlement in the State. It is in this county, that early settlers, the military and fortune seekers disembarked on steamboats and continued their journey west on routes with colorful names such as the Whoop Up Trail, Old Forts Trail and the Mullan Trail. Remnants of this past are still visible in the historic buildings and trail markers found throughout the County.

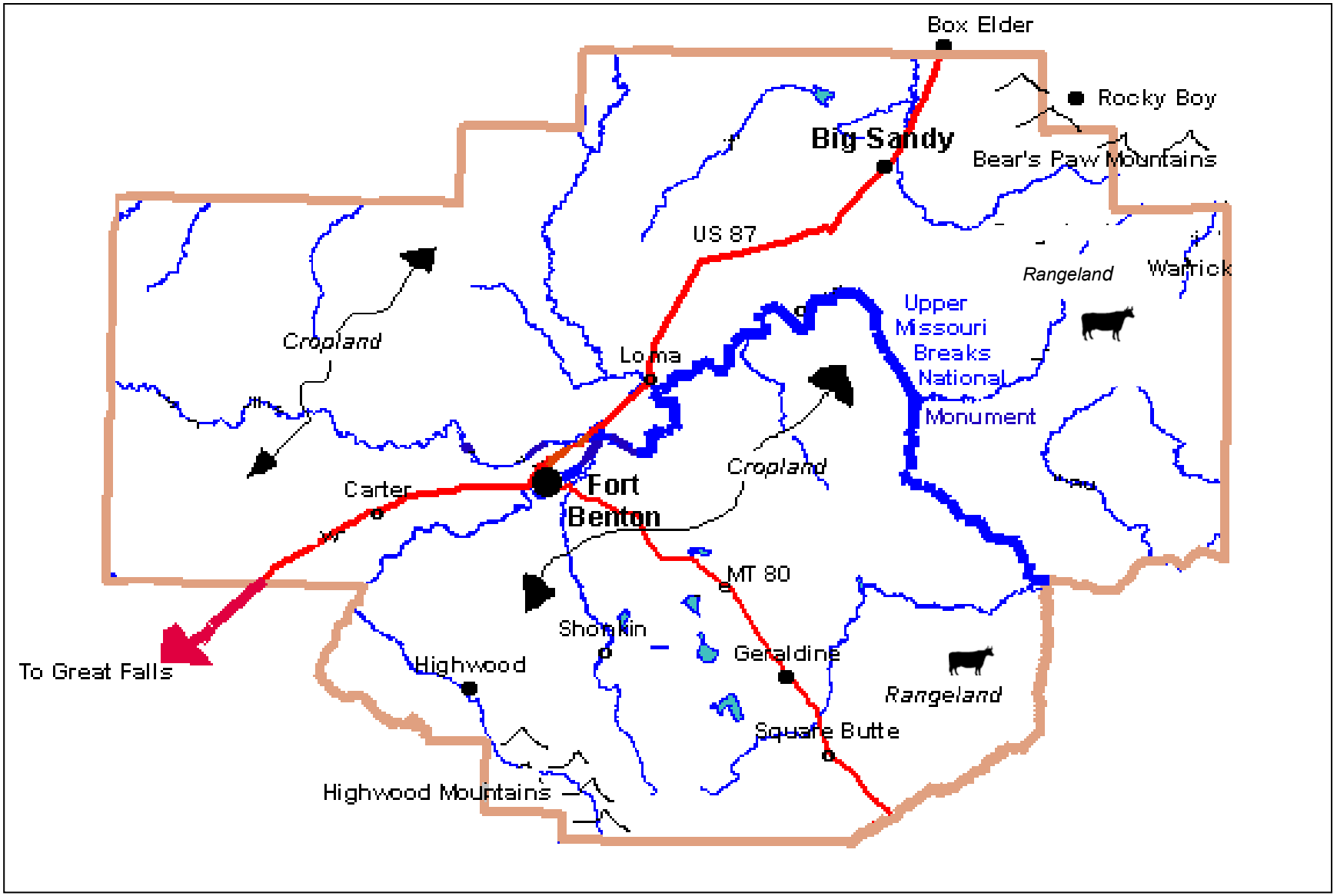
Today's major travel routes, however, by-pass present day Chouteau County. There are no four-lane highways and no stop lights in any of its towns. Except for the expanses of grain crops that represent the region's agricultural bounty, the landscape has changed little from its homesteading past. Chouteau County consistently ranks among the top wheat producing counties in the State. Its economy is closely linked to agricultural yields and farm economics. Drought, crop and livestock prices, and federal policies can have dramatic effect on the local economy.

At the height of its boom in 1920, the County's population peaked at 11,051. Population has declined every decade and in 2015, the Census estimate was 5,767. Out-migration, smaller families, improved farming technology that required a smaller labor force and regional population stagnation have all contributed to the population trends.

Despite lack of growth, the County must still plan so it can effectively provide services a changing population. With fewer school age children and seniors living longer, this places new challenges for education, housing and service providers. Water and sewer infrastructure throughout the county is aging. While some communities have kept pace with upgrades, others must determine how to finance expensive improvements. The health of the local economy fluctuates significantly depending on agricultural production and regional population growth.

The planning that is done as part of the Growth Policy Process will help decision makers understand these trends and be prepared to respond accordingly. It will help identify partnerships, planning tools, and resources that can help address these issues. The plan provides a framework to maintain the rural character while responding to regional and national trends. It is a policy tool that will help Chouteau County continue to maintain the high quality of life that attracted the early settlers.

Figure 1: Chouteau County Key Features Map



Prepared by: Applied Communications, September 2004

PLANNING BACKGROUND

1. Chouteau County History

The area that is now Chouteau County was largely inhabited by the Indian tribes of the Blackfoot Nation when the Lewis and Clark expedition journeyed through the area in 1805. Conflicts with these tribes prevented the establishments of trading posts until an agreement was reached with the American Fur Company in 1830. Afterwards, forts to serve both white and Indian traders, who exchanged pelts for goods, were built along the Marias and Missouri Rivers. Many forts were constructed and subsequently abandoned as hostilities with the Indians arose. Fort Benton was established and named after Missouri Senator Thomas Benton.

In 1860, 55 years after Lewis and Clark explored the route of the Missouri River, the first steamboat reached Fort Benton from St. Louis, MO. The town became the head of navigation on the longest river in North America and a major connection to the Northwest Territories. The chief items of trade were gold, buffalo hides, high grade ore, Indian blankets, guns, and whiskey. The gold stampede in 1867-1869 marked the height of the boom period for Fort Benton river trade, with thousands of miners coming into and tons of gold dust going out of the town. September 29,1897 marked the demise of Missouri River traffic when the Manitoba Railway (later named the Great Northern) drove its silver spike at Fort Benton.

As river trade faded, the livestock boom began, and thousands of Texas longhorn cattle were brought to Chouteau County on the Chisholm Trail. Records show that in 1885 100,000 cattle, 60,000 sheep, and 10,000 horses ranged south of the Maria's River. The following year severe winter blizzards claimed 50 to 95% of the herds, prey of the open range. By the mid 1890's Fort Benton arose as a major stock and wool shipping point.

Extensive settlement of the Chouteau County area began in the early 1900's, intensified by the Homestead Act of 1909. By 1913 most of the arable land was in private ownership. Steam powered engines were tilling the soil in the Carter area and the days of the open range were over. Small grain farming prospered until the bank collapse of the early 1920's broke hundreds of homesteaders due to inflated land values, unhealthy farming practices and poor economic policies. Those who survived the crash improved their dryland farming techniques and continued to harvest high yields of small grains. By the mid 1920's, Chouteau County became the largest wheat producing county in Montana and consistently raises 10% of the state's total. Both winter and spring wheat are grown, as well as barley, oats, sunflower, safflower, alfalfa, and various certified seeds.

The Montana Territorial Legislature established Chouteau County on February 2, 1865, named for Pierre Chouteau of the American Fur Company. Fort Benton is the county seat. Other incorporated towns are Big Sandy and Geraldine. Unincorporated population centers include Carter, Loma and Highwood. In 2015, the population estimate was 5,767 county residents. The county is home to the Chippewa-Cree tribe on the Rocky Boys Indian reservation, the Bear's Paw Mountains and is the gateway to the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

2. Chouteau County Planning History

Chouteau County adopted a revised "Comprehensive Plan" for the County in 1997. Subsequently, the County revised both its Subdivision Regulations and Development permit system. The County adopted a new Growth Policy in 2004. Since the last Growth Policy was completed, Montana has amended the Montana Code Annotated (MCA) several times related to planning and subdivisions. Changes included the requirement for Growth Policies to address the "Wildland Urban Interface" and the gravel resources. The MCA also states that local jurisdictions should update their Growth Policy every five years. The Growth Policy was updated in 2009 and this most current update was commenced in 2016, in compliance with this requirement.

In addition to these legislative changes, the western part of the State of Montana experienced rapid population growth in the last decade. Counties found that regulations that were inadequate to address many concerns related community character, infrastructure costs, providing local services to new subdivisions, and compatibility of uses. To deal with these issues, new planning tools have emerged that can help counties promote sustainable development. The County also participated in the NorthCentral Montana Regional Sustainability Plan that was funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Regional Development.

The combination of legislative changes, concern about potential development issues, and the opportunity to incorporate new planning techniques in the plan are reflected in this update. This plan represents the County's desire to provide for future development that is cost efficient to serve, that will preserve the rural character of the county and that will protect the unique natural resources of the area.

The Growth Policy Plan provides a vision for the County that indicates how it wants to develop and make public investments over the next 20 years. It analyzes land use, natural resources, public facilities, local services, population, economics, and housing to identify local issues and devise appropriate policies that will address those issues in a manner consistent with this vision. It provides the long-range focus to help decision-makers set priorities and evaluate whether development proposals are consistent with this vision. It is a tool to coordinate with other government agencies and to communicate to citizens and developers the vision of the community. The Plan provides the framework for regulatory updates, land use decisions, and public investments and will be an invaluable resource for the County over the next 20-years of the planning horizon.

PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process for the most recent Growth Policy update began in the summer of 2016 with the Planning Board and County Commission meeting with the consultant to oversee preparation of the plan. There were periodic meetings to review draft chapters of the County data profile, to establish direction for the goals and policies, and to commented on other components of the plan.

To obtain public input, County developed an on-line survey with questions regarding land use issues and various policy alternatives. There were 76 responses to the survey. The results are included in the appendix.

In addition to the survey, public hearings on the adoption of the plan provided additional input. The Plan is a dynamic document that represents a continuous process of setting goals and establishing priorities on actions to achieve those goals. This Plan provides for periodic updates and review of the plan. These updates will allow the County to reflect changing conditions and take advantage of new opportunities.

The 2016 update was not intended to be a complete revision of the current plan. It primarily involved a review to by the Planning Board to update data, add new maps and included new sections to comply with changes in the Montana Code Annotated. The Planning Board also reviewed the Goals and Policies and modified them to reflect new planning trends and opportunities to coordinate with various new programs.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Tip 1: Where to find Data & Statistics

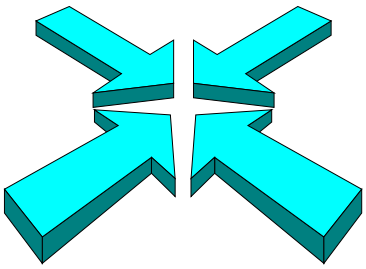
The County Profile section contains the data that was compiled for the plan. The data comes from census information as well as State and local agencies. A detail reference section is at the end of the County Profile and list the sources for the data. For additional information consult these sources.

Tip 2: Locating Goals & Policies

The goals and policies are derived primarily from issues that emerged from the information that was compiled for the County Profile. The Goals and Policy subjects have the same heading as the county profile section in this document. To locate a policy that may deal with a particular issue, it might be helpful to browse through the table of contents for the county profile section. The goal or policy will likely be located under the same heading as the topic in the profile.

Tip 3: Copies of the Plan

Copies of the plan will be located at each of the public libraries in the County. Upon adoption of the plan, it is the intent of the County to have electronic files of the plan on the County web site for. Additionally, the County Planning Department can make copies of all or part of the plan with a charge to cover the copy costs.



Goals & Policies

"Development policy statements should emerge from a process of identifying planning issues, problems and assets, and from formulating goal and objective statements."

A Primer on Land Use Planning and Regulation for Local Governments, Montana Department of Commerce Community Technical Assistance Program

Goals and policies provide the framework for the Growth Policy. They present the community's values and are a guide for comparing alternatives, setting priorities, and measuring progress of various programs. Goals and policies each represent a different level of detail. Goals flow from identification of planning issues to a general goal statement that describes what the County is striving towards to specific policies that can be translated to action. Following are some common definitions of Goals and Policies.

Goal: A goal is the most general statement and sets the broad framework for objectives and policies. It provides the overall vision of what the community is striving for.

Policy: Policy statements represent specific actions. A policy is more detailed than an objective and can readily be translated into a specific action or program.

ECONOMY & POPULATION

Issue 1.0 The county's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture. Consequently, per capita income and support of local businesses fluctuates dramatically depending on agricultural production and crop prices. Weather conditions, economic trends and fuel prices are variables that can greatly impact the agricultural economy. Additionally, cropland that has been taken out of production due to the Conservation Reserve Program has translated into fewer dollars circulating in the local economy. Creating jobs by supporting small business, value added agriculture, and Main Street businesses were the preferred types of economic development by respondents to the survey. Over the last decade, the tourism industry has grown and there was support for expanding this sector.

Goal 1.1 Support the agricultural base of the county, while providing for diversification and broadening of the economy.

a. Continue supporting the use of new technology and research to enhance agricultural production.

b. Support sustainable development especially in agricultural fields and utilization of agricultural by-products, including alternative energy and value-added industry.

c. Strengthen main street business and work with communities to revitalize downtown areas.

d. Increase employment opportunities by providing planning assistance and entrepreneurial expertise to small businesses.

e. Create a business climate that will attract home based Internet businesses and telecommuters.

f. Work with Bear Paw Development Corporation and other state and regional agencies to implement strategies in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region.

g. Encourage business retention and expansion by identifying business needs and supporting “buy-local” programs.

h. Support the development of natural resources if it done in a sustainable manner that does not degrade water, air and other resources

i. Promote increased workforce development and training opportunities.

Goal 1.2 Enhance the recreational and tourism opportunities throughout the county, while protecting the environment, unique geological features, and natural resources of the area.

a. Improve public access to recreational areas while promoting cooperation and good relationships between recreationalists and landowners.

b. Preserve natural resources, including historic and scenic, for the enjoyment and benefit of all.

c. Encourage the development of recreational facilities and services, such as campgrounds, RV Parks, boat ramps, lodging, restaurants, and picnic areas that are compatible with the environment.

d. Promote tourism through marketing, planning and promoting events that focus on the family, cultural tourism and outdoor recreational pursuits.

e. Develop recreational tourism to supplement agricultural operations such as trail riding, hunting, and birding.

Issue 2.0 The population of Chouteau County peaked in 1920 but has since experienced continual decline. The population is projected to decline by 6.5% from the year 2010 to the year 2030. This population is aging with a growing number of elderly over 65 years of age and a decreasing birth rate. There is potential for some population growth as the result of in-migration Rocky Boy's Reservation. Population growth is also affected by population trends in adjacent Cascade County.

Goal 2.1 Stabilize the population and seek a steady but slow growth rate with a balance of age groups represented.

a. Encourage economic diversity to provide opportunities for youth, retain local populace and attract retirees.

b. Integrate newcomers into the county smoothly and encourage their participation in local community development efforts and civic affairs.

Goal 2.2 Provide the means for young adults from the County to remain in the area and attract young families that represent the future of the area.

a. Work with schools to keep in touch with graduates.

b. Review needs of young families to identify service gaps.

c. Actively engage young adults in community leadership positions.

d. Work with local agencies to promote activities and entertainment for youth.

HOUSING

Issue 1.0 More than half of the housing stock in Chouteau County is over 40 years old. Older homes are more likely to have deferred maintenance and require modernization to upgrade to new appliances, energy efficiency features, and accommodations for an aging population. According to Department of Revenue data, 42% of the housing stock in the County is rated as below average (unsound, poor, or fair). The majority of the housing units in this category are located in the unincorporated areas of the County

Goal 1.1 Promote housing rehab and remodeling to meet the needs of the changing population in the County and to improve overall condition of housing stock in the county.

a. Encourage construction of new housing to fulfill the needs of retired couples and new young families.

b. Explore the future needs for facilities to meet the demands of special populations such as senior citizens and homeless individuals.

c. Work with service clubs to construct ramps for handicapped accessibility and other modifications so elderly residents can remain in their own homes.

d. Work with lenders to provide information to seniors regarding funding options for home modifications.

e. Encourage practices that promote energy efficiency in new housing construction.

f. Compile a resource directory of weatherization programs and energy audits through the State, utility companies, and senior services.

g. Work with housing agencies and lenders to promote programs for improvement and rehabilitation.

Issue 2.0 According to the survey, there is a shortage of rental units in the county. Due to the high demand for rental units, rents are typically too high for the average worker. Although, there is a high vacancy rate in the county and many houses are vacant and have severe deterioration. Much of the available rental units are also in poor condition

Goal 2.1 Improve overall condition of housing stock in the County.

a. Work with property owners to redevelop properties that are vacant and have been classified as "severely substandard."

b. Provide information about programs for low-income residents on loan and grant programs for rental assistance, fair housing and home improvement.

c. Conduct housing needs assessment in unincorporated settlements and identify strategies to meet the demand for affordable, decent, rental units.

LAND USE

Issue 1.0 The unincorporated developed areas of Highwood, Loma, Carter, and Square Butte have property maintenance issues such as abandoned vehicles, deteriorated buildings, overgrown weeds and debris that need to be addressed. Differing levels of property maintenance and potential for incompatible land uses can especially be issues in the city-county interface. The survey input indicated strong support for cleaning up contaminated properties.

Goal 1.1 Promote community revitalization through removal of blighting influences.

a. Support tree replacement and landscaping beautification efforts in the organized communities within the county.

b. Organize community clean-up efforts focused on removal of debris and yard maintenance.

c. Examine code enforcement procedures for nuisance and property maintenance violations. Investigate funding sources for removal of abandoned vehicles.

d. Investigate brownfield programs to clean-up hazardous sites for redevelopment.

Issue 2.0 The areas of Carter and Highwood that are within commuting distance to Great Falls are experiencing some development pressures. Respondents to the survey indicated support for safe, orderly growth that pays for itself and reflects the agricultural and rural character of the county. There was also support for concentrating growth near existing communities. The survey indicated that residents value the agriculture, open space, the small town rural lifestyle and sense of community. A joint land use study for Malmstrom Air Force Base indicated a need for compatible development near missile silos.

Goal 2.1 Encourage growth that protects and enhances the agricultural, recreational and natural resource base of the economy.

a. Protect the natural beauty and environment of Chouteau County, while allocating sufficient land for future needs of industrial and commercial uses, for community facilities and for residential use.

b. Consider adopting regulations for signs, open space, billboards and other provisions that will preserve the rural quality of life.

c. Prepare land use maps and maps for planning which will be of aid to future administrators, planners and developers.

d. Encourage cluster subdivisions and housing developments.

e. Promote land development around communities that can provide services and discourage inefficient land use patterns that make it difficult to provide public services.

f. Identify areas with prime farmland and promote mechanisms to preserve such land.

g. Encourage the use of conservation easements by private landowners wanting to protect natural resources, open spaces, and agricultural production.

Goal 2.2 Promote development that is compatible with existing land uses and that minimizes negative impacts on neighboring uses.

a. Confine impacts development to the site (parking, noise, glare, dust, …..) or mitigate impacts on neighboring properties.

b. Minimize conflicts between incompatible types of land uses with buffers and screening.

c. Adopt development standards that are adequate to meet health and safety concerns.

d. Create procedures to support neighborhood plans and zoning where citizens initiate action.

e. Coordinate development review with different local, state and federal agencies that are involved in various aspects of development or may be affected by new development.

f. Promote livable, healthy and sustainable communities through the integration of design with existing transportation, commercial and public services.

g. Protect areas near missile silos from encroachment and incompatible development.

Issue 3.0 Natural features located along the Missouri River and unique land forms, mountain ranges and waterways result in issues regarding scenic resources, steep slopes, and coordination with management of public lands. The survey indicated strong support for preserving historic properties.

Goal 3.1 Promote development and efforts that preserve the heritage of the area.

a. Support land development regulations that prevent the misuse of our natural resources.

b. Actively participate in planning efforts with the Bureau of Land Management and the Lewis and Clark Forest regarding plans for public lands in the County.

c. Compile and provide information regarding programs and other incentives to preserve historical structures, landmarks and natural heritage areas.

d. Conduct additional studies as needed to collect planning data, identify threats to natural heritage, identify compatible land use activities and strategies.

e. Preserve sensitive lands (subject to geological and flood hazards) as open space where possible.

f. Protect farmland from increased runoff and weed proliferation.

g. Direct new development to areas that are relatively free of environmental problems (e.g. soils, slope, bedrock, water table, and floodplain areas.) and within reasonable proximity to community services such as power, roads, police, fire and transit.

h. Support efforts to establish the Upper Missouri River Heritage Area through the National Park Service.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Issue 1.0: All watersheds in the County are experiencing some degree of impairment such as streambank destabilization and habitat alteration. There are issues with erosion and noxious weeds along streams and travel corridors. Coordinated efforts by watershed groups and government entities are addressing these issues. The survey indicated the residents highly value clean air and clean water and felt that protecting water quality should be a priority.

Goal 1.1 Improve the overall water quality of the major rivers and streams in the County.

a. Support efforts by watershed planning groups through involvement, consultation, technical assistance, and partnerships on projects

b. Notify and request input from appropriate agencies of new development or activities that may affect water quality.

c. Require land stewardship plans with major subdivision submittals that address such things as noxious weed control, wildlife, livestock grazing, other agricultural uses, and protection of water resources.

d. Encourage landowners adjacent to waterways to use best management practices and protect water quality.

e. Adopt standards for development along water corridors to reduce non-point pollution and promote natural drainage improvements in order to protect water quality.

Goal 1.2 Preserve and protect ground water resources in the County.

a. Discourage development in areas having inappropriate soils for on-site wastewater treatment to help prevent the contamination of ground water supplies.

b. Encourage feedlots and other intensive livestock operations to locate in the areas with low potential for ground and surface water contamination.

c. Promote best management practices for road, bridge, and building construction to avoid water pollution.

d. Coordinate with communities on strategies to implement source water protection plans. Provide citizen education regarding the source and distribution of our water supplies, the potential threats to the quality and quantity of our drinking water, and pollution prevention methods.

Issue 2.0 The County has a varied and dramatic geological landscape that includes public lands, and abundance of fish and wildlife species, and variations in the availability of groundwater resources. New development and use of natural resources should account for these factors. There was strong support in the community survey to adopt development regulations that balance the conservation efforts with the protection of property rights.

Goal 2.1 Preserve high quality of life by protecting natural heritage such as wildlife, clean air, scenic vistas and cultural resources.

a. Provide for appropriate setbacks along the Missouri River to protect the visual corridor and preserve the natural setting.

b. Coordinate development standards for sensitive lands such as floodplains and slopes with regulatory agencies that oversee these areas.

c. Work with other agencies to educate landowners and land development professionals on agricultural practices that promote conservation and wildlife values.

d. Consult with state agencies on new development to make sure they are in conformance with air quality, wetland regulations and other standards.

e. Promote programs and best management practices to control the spread of noxious weeds.

f. Partner with State, Federal and other area agencies on natural resource protection programs.

g. Develop gravel extraction operations to avoid land use and traffic conflicts as well as protect water quality, air quality and other environmental concerns.

h. Encourage the voluntary use of conservation easements by landowners wanting to assure their land remains forever available for agricultural production thereby preserving scenic vistas, open space and wildlife habitat.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Issue1.0 Most roads in the County are gravel and designed for low traffic volumes. Significant residential development on such roads could create maintenance and safety concerns. Increased truck traffic due to consolidation of grain loading facilities may also affect traffic patterns. The planning survey indicated that the large majority of respondents felt that road improvements were the biggest infrastructure need. This is especially a concern due to long commuting distances in the County. There was also agreement that new development should not increase property taxes.

Goal 1.1 Develop a transportation network and transit plan of construction, maintenance, and safety standards so that reliable access to various parts of the county is provided and to assure that farm to market transportation needs are meet.

a. Bring all primary, secondary, and county roads up to accepted engineering and safety standards.

b. Establish a priority list for the development of a better road system.

c. Adopt a capital improvement program to schedule needed improvements.

d. Work with the Montana Department of Transportation to provide improved access, safe roads, and traffic control on all roads on the primary and secondary system.

e. Coordinate with regional transit agencies to provide more transportation choices such as an intercity transit stop, paratransit and elder transit.

f. Support on-going upgrades and improvements to county airports and prevent conflicts with adjacent land-uses.

g. Support continued freight rail service in the County.

h. Integrate transportation considerations into land-use and economic development processes.

i. Design transportation improvements to accommodate pedestrians.

Goal 1.2 Roads serving new development should be designed in a safe and efficient manner that does not burden existing tax payers.

a. Adopt design standards for construction of roads in new developments to ensure adequate future maintenance and right-of-way for service vehicles.

b. Require developers to pay for new roads serving the development through adequate financial guarantees for transportation improvements in new development.

c. Develop a policy to address maintenance and dedication issues for private roads.

d. Require that road upgrades due to traffic from new developments be paid for through a mechanism such as a rural improvement district or special improvement district.

e. Require new developments to have access or plans for adequate transportation facilities before they are approved.

Issue 2.0 The water systems of several rural water districts and the towns are at capacity and can not handle additional users. The Northcentral Montana Regional Water System may provide a source of water to address current shortages but this is a long-term solution that will not be available to address immediate concerns. Water quality issues are present in several community wastewater treatment facilities. Survey input indicated high levels of support for clean water. There was also support in the survey for renewable energy development.

Goal 2.1 Promote the development of widespread and efficient services to the county, while minimizing the costs to the taxpayer.

a. Plan for adequate and potable water systems, as well as environmentally sound sewer and solid waste disposal systems to meet the needs of the future population in the county. Explore solutions for these issues both with the developed communities and with the outlying areas.

b. Examine the potential for water quality and sustainable watershed problems in Chouteau County, by studying point and non-point source water pollution, saline seep and irrigation use.

c. Facilitate communication and cooperation between all levels of government within the county.

d. Coordinate with appropriate governing bodies on assessing and improving facilities. Provide technical or grant writing assistance.

e. Encourage partnerships and innovative approaches to improve facilities such as the NorthCentral Montana Regional Water System.

f. Design public facilities for long-term sustainability and economy of operation and maintenance.

g. Promote energy efficiency and environmental friendly solutions in the design of public facilities.

h. Promote development of renewable energy while mitigating potential impacts and providing for adequate operation and maintenance of such facilities.

i. Require new developments to have plans for expansion and funding of adequate water and sewer infrastructure that is required to serve the development.

LOCAL SERVICES

Issue 1.0 Emergency services for fire protection and ambulance require adequate rural addressing to respond quickly to the incident. Adequate water resources in the vicinity of residential areas is critical for firefighting needs. In recent years the County has adopted a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and a Hazard Mitigation Plan. The survey indicated that residents generally did not feel the county had adequate resources to respond to disasters.

Goal 1.1 Provide adequate and timely emergency service to all County residents.

a. Support the continued development of quality health and medical care, as well as safety, fire, and law enforcement needs throughout the county.

b. Keep abreast of rapidly changing technology and advancements in emergency services and preventive health issues.

c. Coordinate between rural fire departments and with agencies with fire fighting responsibility on public lands.

d. Require new development to have adequate water supply for fire fighting and incorporate fire protection measures in their design

e. Discourage development where emergency services cannot be provided in a timely manner

f. Design standards for roads should include provisions for adequate emergency vehicle access

g. Require GIS information for rural addressing in all new developments.

h. Coordinate with fire fighting agencies to promote programs for homeowners that will assist with wildfire issues.

i. Implement the mitigation goals in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Issues 2.0 Schools in Fort Benton and Big Sandy have experienced declining enrollments. While existing school facilities have been upgraded, future upgrades may be difficult with less revenue from the State resulting from fewer students in the system.

Goal 2.1. **Stimulate cultural and intellectual growth by maintaining quality educational systems**

a. Coordinate with school district to identify issues regarding future enrollments and capital improvements of facilities.

b. Notify schools of pending new developments in their district. Discourage incompatible land uses from locating in vicinity of schools.

c. Explore technology solutions with schools to provide additional educational opportunities for students and the community.

d. Consider multiple uses for schools such as open space, recreation, and community meeting space that could provide additional revenue for the school. Support grants for education.

e. Encourage adaptive reuse for closed schools in the county.

f. Encourage public investment in cultural facilities such as the arts, museums, and libraries.

Issue 3.0: The County has an aging population that will increase demand for health services and require facilities that can accommodate people with disabilities. The county also reflects nationwide trends regarding higher rates of obesity and chronic disease.

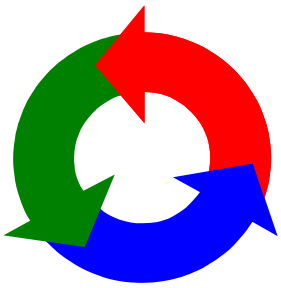
Goal 3.1 The County shall promote healthy lifestyles for all residents and promote designs of new facilities and housing to accommodate people with disabilities.

a. Coordinate with human service agencies to develop a coordinated response to address the needs of the population with disabilities and chronic disease.

b. Design streets, open space and developments to promote physical activity.

c. Consider health impacts in making land use decisions.

d. Promote mobility and quality of life for elderly and disabled residents.



IMPLEMENTATION

OVERVIEW

"In short, planning is only as good as the commitment and abilities of the people responsible for carrying out the town plan." (The Small Town Planning Handbook, Daniels, Keller, Lapping)

The implementation strategies provide a blueprint for translating the goals and objectives into measurable achievements. The goals and objectives provide a framework for decision making and indicate the level of involvement that the local government feels necessary to address an issue. The implementation program outlines specific action steps that are derived from the goals and policies. A successful implementation strategy helps the community establish priorities and identifies the resources to accomplish these action steps. This MCA contains the following requirements for the content of a growth policy.

76-1-601. Growth policy -- contents.
(1) A growth policy may cover all or part of the jurisdictional area.

(2) The extent to which a growth policy addresses the elements listed in subsection (3) is at the full discretion of the governing body.

(3) A growth policy must include:
(a) community goals and objectives;

(b) maps and text describing an inventory of the existing characteristics and features of the jurisdictional area, including:
(i) land uses;
(ii) population;
(iii) housing needs;
(iv) economic conditions;
(v) local services;
(vi) public facilities;
(vii) natural resources;
(viii) sand and gravel resources; and
(ix) other characteristics and features proposed by the planning board and adopted by the governing bodies;

(c) projected trends for the life of the growth policy for each of the following elements:
(i) land use;
(ii) population;
(iii) housing needs;
(iv) economic conditions;
(v) local services;
(vi) natural resources; and

(vii) other elements proposed by the planning board and adopted by the governing bodies;

(d) a description of policies, regulations, and other measures to be implemented in order to achieve the goals and objectives established pursuant to subsection (3)(a);

(e) a strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure, including drinking water systems, wastewater treatment facilities, sewer systems, solid waste facilities, fire protection facilities, roads, and bridges;

(f) an implementation strategy that includes:
(i) a timetable for implementing the growth policy;
(ii) a list of conditions that will lead to a revision of the growth policy; and
(iii) a timetable for reviewing the growth policy at least once every 5 years and revising the policy if necessary;

(g) a statement of how the governing bodies will coordinate and cooperate with other jurisdictions that explains:
(i) if a governing body is a city or town, how the governing body will coordinate and cooperate with the county in which the city or town is located on matters related to the growth policy;
(ii) if a governing body is a county, how the governing body will coordinate and cooperate with cities and towns located within the county's boundaries on matters related to the growth policy;

(h) a statement explaining how the governing bodies will:
(i) define the criteria in 76-3-608(3)(a); and
(ii) evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria in 76-3-608(3)(a);

(i) a statement explaining how public hearings regarding proposed subdivisions will be conducted; and

(j) an evaluation of the potential for fire and wildland fire in the jurisdictional area, including whether or not there is a need to:
(i) delineate the wildland-urban interface; and
(ii) adopt regulations requiring:
(A) defensible space around structures;
(B) adequate ingress and egress to and from structures and developments to facilitate fire suppression activities; and

TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

This section describes the various tools that are part of the implementation strategy to carry out the recommendations of the plan.

1) Land Development Regulations

Chouteau County currently has a Subdivision Ordinance and Development Permit Regulations that control land development in the County. The subdivision ordinance regulates the subdivision of land, platting of lots, dedication of new roads, and the provision of infrastructure improvements. The ordinance contains procedures for the preparation, review and filing of subdivision documents. The Development Permit System contains standards for commercial and industrial uses anywhere within the County and contains standards for development along the river corridor. It does not regulate location of uses but does contain some standards for site planning, setbacks, parking, roads, and development adjacent to the Missouri River. There is a permitting process required for these uses. Both documents should to be updated to reflect the policies in the growth policy plan and to comply with State legislative mandates as well as current judicial rulings.

In addition to the existing regulatory mechanisms in place, the Montana Code provides for petition by landowners to create a planning and zoning district with accompanying development regulations. (MCA 76-2 (Part 1).) There are no areas in Chouteau County where landowners have taken such actions.

2) Administrative Procedures

Many of the Plan's goals can be advanced through modifying and improving administrative procedures. This may include developing and updating mailing lists, updating forms, creating checklists and other user aids, reviewing notification procedures, distribution of plans, and examining timelines for reviews. The overall aim of these techniques is to promote more efficient use of staff resources, ensure comprehensive reviews and provide responsive service to the community.

3) Planning Studies & Data Gathering

There are areas and issues that require more detailed studies and special strategies. These areas can be designated as special area studies or neighborhood planning areas that will be subject of a separate planning process with targeted strategies specific to that area. In addition to these study areas, there may be information that would be useful to decision-makers but was unavailable at the time of the planning process. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan are examples of special studies. Specific data gathering efforts such as instituting a Geographic Information System (GIS) or land inventories are examples such planning initiatives.

4) State & Federal Programs/Technical Assistance

There are a variety of State and Federal programs available to help localities achieve the goals of the plan. The more commonly used programs include the Community Development Block Grant program, Treasure State Endowment Program, Community Technical Assistance Program, State Historic Preservation Office, and others. State agencies such as the Department of Environmental Quality, and Department of Natural Resource Conversation administer permitting procedures that may influence land development. The Montana Department of Transportation is responsible for much of the transportation infrastructure in the County. The USDA Farm Service Agencies, Rural Development Programs and Montana State Cooperative Extension are active in the County. Additionally, a number of professional organizations provide technical assistance and other resources. These include Montana Association of Counties (MACO), Montana Association of Planners (MAP) and non-profits.

5) Education Programs & Public Outreach

Many planning objectives can be accomplished through voluntary efforts from citizens in the community. Communicating the plan's vision to the public is critical. Education and outreach efforts include disseminating information through publications, brochures, new sreleases, service announcements, displays and other public relations methods. It also means obtaining regular feedback through task forces, surveys, public meetings, and customer service questionnaires.

6) Conservation Easements

The property owner grants an easement to a nonprofit group (land trust, conservation group …) or public agency (Fish, Wildlife and Parks, …) to guarantee its preservation. Conservation easements can be used to preserve open space, wildlife habitat, and environmentally sensitive areas. The property owner retains use of the land and receives tax benefits. (76-6-101, MCA)

7) Design Guidelines

Design guidelines describe and illustrate site plan and design techniques that promote good design and environmentally sound practices. Guidelines are mostly an educational tool and compliance with the guidelines is voluntary. Some guidelines may eventually be adopted as part of a regulatory system.

8) Community Decay

The Montana Code Annotated authorizes counties to adopt community decay ordinances to address blight and property maintenance issues. (7-5-2111).

9) Inter-Local Agreements

Inter-local agreements have been used between the city, county, sewer districts and rural fire districts. These agreements are recognized under the Montana Planning Statutes as a tool for the creation of joint planning boards, mutual aid agreements, code enforcement and other issues. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) can be used as a tool to spell out specific obligations, agreements and cooperative efforts between parties, either public or private.

10) NorthCentral Montana Regional Plan

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November 2011, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), through the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, awarded Opportunity Link — a regional non-profit in Northcentral Montana — a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant. The plan covered an 11 -county area that included Chouteau County. The Partnership, a collaborative effort between HUD, Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) works to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to promote regional goals. Local governments can leverage the information in the plan to apply for grants and to support local planning projects.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

A. Capital Improvement Plan

The City of Fort Benton and the Town of Big Sandy have Capital Improvement Plans to address public facilities. The county has an action item to complete a Capital Improvements Plan in accordance with the following guidelines.

> "A Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) is a budgeting and financial tool used by a local governing body to establish public works rehabilitation and maintenance priorities and to establish funding for repairs and improvements. The CIP includes planning, setting priorities, effective public works management, financial management, and community decision process. A CIP consists of five basic elements:
>
> 1) inventory and evaluation of existing conditions for each facility (needs assessment);
> 2) prioritization of improvement needs for each public facility and prioritization of the needs for the entire infrastructure;
> 3) identification of monetary options that can be used to meet the needs;
> 4) establishment of a time schedule that matches available funds to the improvements required to meet the system needs; and
> 5) a brief written document (the CIP which is formally adopted by the governing body by resolution or by ordinance."
>
> (*Source: Montana Department of Commerce, The Mini Capital Improvements Plan for Small Towns")*

B. Road Funding

The primary source of funding for County road improvements is the County's general fund. The Federal Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program allows some funds to be used for local roads while the State Construction Fund, from state gas tax dollars, are for projects not eligible for Federal aid.

The County Road and Bridge Department is responsible for maintaining public roads and bridges in the unincorporated area that are not part of the state highway system. Private roads in residential developments that have not been improved to County standards and have not been dedicated as public right-of-way are the responsibility of the private landowner.

C. Facility Plans

Municipalities in the County have completed or initiated the following facility plans to identify existing needs and project future improvements to accommodate future growth. The plans that have been completed are summarized elsewhere in this Growth Policy and are listed below. The County supports these planning efforts.

1) Fort Benton, "2009 Water System Preliminary Engineering Report (PER)"

2) Rocky Boy's/North Central Montana Regional Water Authority - Value Engineering (VE) Study for North Central Montana Regional Water System

3) Big Sandy Wastewater Facility Plan – 2008

4) Fort Benton a Preliminary Engineering Report- 2010.

D. Funding Resources

Following is a summary of financing mechanisms that may be used to fund infrastructure improvements.

- Public Works Program - Economic Development Administration - The Economic Development Administration (EDA) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Commerce. The purpose of the Public Works Program is to assist communities with the funding of public works and development facilities that contribute to the creation or retention of private sector jobs and to the alleviation of unemployment and underemployment. Such assistance is designed to help communities achieve lasting improvement by stabilizing and diversifying local economies, and improving local living conditions and the economic environment of the area. Grants are awarded up to a participation level of 80 percent but the average EDA grant covers approximately 50 percent of project costs. Acceptable sources of match include cash, local general obligation or revenue bonds, Community Development Block Grants, TSEP grants and loans, entitlement funds, Rural Development loans and other public and private financing, including donations.

- Community Transportation Alternative Program - · Transportation Alternative Program- The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) was authorized under Section 1122 of Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21) The TAP provides funding for programs and projects defined as transportation alternatives, including on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility, community improvement activities, and environmental mitigation; recreational trail program projects; safe routes to school projects; and projects for planning, designing, or constructing boulevards and other roadways largely in the right-of-way of former Interstate System routes or other divided highways.

- State Fuel Tax— Under 15-70-101, MCA, Montana assesses a tax of $.27 per gallon on gasoline and diesel fuel used for transportation purposes. Each county and incorporated city and town receives a portion of the total tax funds allocated to cities and towns based on:

  1) The ratio of the population within each county or city and town to the total population in all cities and towns in the State;
  2) The ratio of the road or street mileage within each county or city and town to the total street mileage in in the State. The street mileage is exclusive of the Interstate, National Highway, and Primary Systems.

  All fuel tax funds allocated to local governments must be used for the construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and repair of rural roads or city streets and alleys. Priorities for the use of these funds are established by the local governments receiving them.

- Debt Financing – County can make use of various kinds of debt financing to fund urban renewal projects. These include general obligation bonds, special improvement district bonds and revenue bonds as well as Tax Increment Financing Bonds. Debt financing enables local governments to finance major infrastructure projects using future revenue from special assessments, user fees, and other forms of revenue. Under 7-7-4101, MCA, a city or town council has power to incur indebtedness by borrowing money, issuing

bonds, issuing notes, entering into leases, entering into lease-purchase agreements, or entering into installment purchase contracts for the following purposes:

(1) acquiring land for and designing and erecting public buildings;
(2) acquiring land for and designing and constructing sewers, sewage treatment and disposal plants, waterworks, reservoirs, reservoir sites, and lighting plants;
(3) supplying the city or town with water by contract and the construction or purchase of canals or ditches and water rights for supplying the city or town with water;
(4) designing and constructing bridges, docks, wharves, breakwaters, piers, jetties, and moles;
(5) acquiring, opening, or widening any street and improving the street by constructing, reconstructing, and repairing pavement, gutters, curbs, and vehicle parking strips and to pay all or any portion of the cost relating to the project;
(6) purchasing or leasing fire apparatus, street and other equipment, and personal property, including without limitation, vehicles, telephone systems, and photocopy and office equipment, including computer hardware and software; (7) building, purchasing, designing, constructing, and maintaining devices intended to protect the safety of the public from open ditches carrying irrigation or other water;
(8) funding outstanding warrants and maturing bonds; and
(9) repaying tax protests lost by the city, town, or other municipal corporation. The local government incurs various administrative costs in conjunction with issuing bonds. These costs include the retention of legal counsel and financial consultants, the establishment of reserve funds and the preparation of the prospectus and various required documents. These bonds provide tax-free interest earnings to purchasers and are therefore subject to detailed scrutiny under both state and federal law. The citations in the Montana Code are listed below, for each type of bond described.

- Special Improvement Districts— Under 7-12-4101, MCA, cities and towns can create special improvement districts for a number of activities including:

1. The acquisition, construction or reconstruction of public streets and roads
2. The acquisition, construction or reconstruction of sidewalks, culverts, bridges, gutters, curbs, steps and parks including the planting of trees
3. The construction or reconstruction of sewers, ditches, drains, conduits, and channels for sanitary or drainage purposes, with outlets, cesspools, manholes, catch basins, flush tanks, septic tanks, connecting sewers, ditches, drains, conduits, channels, and other appurtenances
4. The construction of sewer and water systems including fire hydrants
5. The acquisition and improvement of land to be designated as public park or open-space land
6. The conversion of overhead utilities to underground locations in accordance with 69-4-311 through 69-4-314, MCA
7. The purchase, installation, maintenance, and management of alternative energy production facilities

- General Obligation Bonds - General obligation bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of the city and must be approved by the voters in an election. General obligation bonds are generally payable from ad valorem taxes (based on the value of property) and expressed in mills. General obligation bonds are attractive to bond buyers because they have voter approval and are not as vulnerable to fluctuations in revenue. Cities are assigned a bond debt limit based on a percentage of taxable valuation. General obligation bonds must fall within this limit.

- Revenue Bonds—Under 7-7-4401, MCA, a city or town may issue revenue bonds to finance any project or activity authorized. Revenue Bonds are paid back with revenue sources such as TIF funds, fees, rentals or sell or property.

- Treasure State Endowment Program (Montana Department of Commerce) - The Montana Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) is a state-funded program, authorized under 90-6-701 through 710, MCA, and is administered by the Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC). It is designed to assist local governments in financing capital improvements to sewer and water facilities. Funds are derived from the Montana coal severance tax and made available to local governments as matching grants, loans and grant/loan combinations. TSEP also provides matching grants of up to $15,000 to local governments for preliminary engineering study costs. TSEP funds may not be used for annual operation and maintenance; the purchase of non permanent furnishings; or for refinancing existing debt, except when required in conjunction with the financing of a new TSEP project. Grant requests cannot exceed $500,000 and the local government must typically provide a dollar for dollar match that can include other grant funds. Matching funds can be public or private funds provided by a TSEP applicant to directly support the cost of eligible project activities.

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) - This program provides annual grants on a formula basis to entitled cities and counties to develop viable urban communities by providing decent housing and a suitable living environment, and by expanding economic opportunities, principally for low- and moderate-income persons. The program is authorized under Title 1 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Public Law 93-383, as amended; 42 U.S.C.-5301 et seq. The funds are administered by the Montana Department of Commerce. Non-entitlement communities, under 50,000 in population, must apply for grants on a competitive bases. CDBG funds may be used for activities which include, but are not limited to:

  1. Acquisition of real property;
  2. Relocation and demolition;
  3. Rehabilitation of residential and non-residential structures;
  4. Construction of public facilities and improvements, such as water and sewer
  5. Facilities, streets, neighborhood centers, and the conversion of school buildings for eligible purposes;
  6. Public services, within certain limits;
  7. Activities relating to energy conservation and renewable energy resources; and
  8. Provision of assistance to profit-motivated businesses to carry out economic development and job creation/retention activities.

- Tax Increment Financing – The legislature enacted the Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) statutes in 1974. The purpose of a TIF is to fund infrastructure and other improvements in urban renewal areas and industrial districts. The costs of these improvements can be paid directly with TIF revenues or, in many cases, TIF revenues can be pledged to the payment of bonds issued to pay the costs of the improvements. When a TIF is created, a base taxable value for the district is established. The base taxable value is the taxable value of all property within the TIF district boundary at the time the TIF is established. In following years, the amount of taxable value within the boundary of the TIF should increase. The incremental taxable value for a TIF is the amount by which the taxable value exceeds the base taxable value. The amount of property tax realized by applying the mill levies of taxing jurisdictions present in the TIF against the incremental taxable value is called the tax increment and is distributed to the TIF. The tax increment is available to the TIF to be used for the specific urban renewal or industrial district purposes set forth in §§ 7-15-4282 through 7-15-4292, MCA.

ACTION PLAN

The steps in the action plan are all related to advancing specific goals and objectives. The goals and objectives also establish the type of involvement the County will undertake. Following are criteria for evaluating the action steps.

- Does it relates to a specific need or issue identified in the County profile?
- Does it reflect priorities based on responses to community survey, feedback from public meetings and existing community plans?
- Are there resources available to undertake the effort?
- Does the strategy build on existing assets, take advantage of funding opportunities, or leverage outside resources?
- Does the strategy bring regulations and programs into compliance with State and federal requirements?

The action plan is a matrix that lists the task and identifies staffing, costs considerations, and timeframe parameters for each task. Following is a description of those parameters.

1. Staffing

In-house - Will be completed with existing staff.
Contract - Contract with outside firm to complete work.
Partner - Partner with other state/federal agency, non-profit, or other organization to complete work

2. Cost

High - Requires allocation of new funds that are not existing in budget.
Medium - Can be accomplished with existing budgeted funds.
Low - Zero or minimal costs.

3. Time Frame/Priority

Near Term - Immediate need. To be addressed within one year.
Mid Term - Defined need. May phase in implementation within 1 to 2 years.
Long Term - Requires program development that necessitates a longer timeframe 3+ years
Ongoing - Ongoing activity.
As Needed - Monitor and take action when need arises

1. Update Chouteau County Development Regulations & Procedures

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Revise Subdivision regulations to comply with MCA Requirements	In-House	Low	As needed
2. Amend Development Permit Regulations as needed	In-House	Low	As needed
3. Develop performance standards to minimize potential nuisances from commercial and industrial developments.	In=House	Low	As neede
4. Require information for rural addressing to be submitted with subdivision applications.	Coordinate with Dept. of Emergency Services		
5. Investigate mechanisms for protecting prime agricultural land and sensitive lands along waterways.	Coordinate with Dev. Permit amendments & Watershed plans		

2. Build Information for Planning

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Compile planning library for use of staff & public including informational brochures and reference documents from State and Federal agencies that regulate or influence land use in the County.	In-House	Low	On-going
2. Develop GIS mapping to include information environmentally sensitive areas, historic resources, brownfield sites, scenic viewsheds, wellhead protection zones, zoning overlay districts, natural resources…	Contract	Medium	On-going, As needed

3. Promote the development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure to meet the needs of the citizens of Chouteau County

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Adopt a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for the county.	Contract	Medium to High	Near-Term
2. Adopt policy on jurisdiction and maintenance for public and private roads.	Coordinate with Capital Improvement Plan		
3. Monitor North Central Montana Regional Water System process and pass resolution of support when considered for additional legislation or grants	In-house	Low	As-Needed
4. Support grant applications for towns and water & sewer districts as well as efforts regarding technical assistance, and information sharing on common water and sewer difficulties.	Partner	Low	As – Needed
5. Revise development standards to accommodate fire protection vehicles and reflect standards for fire prevention.	Coordinate with Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and Community Wildfire Protection Plan		
6. Work with local jurisdictions to host a grant writing workshop with representatives from State and Federal agencies.	Partner	Low	As Needed

4. Work with County, State and Federal agencies and non-profit agencies to coordinate planning for special areas of the area.

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Work with watershed planning groups to develop design guidelines and best management practices.	Partner	Low	Mid-Term
2. Coordinate with Bureau of Land Management on plan implementation for the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.	In-house	Low	On-going
3. Coordinate with USFS on revision of Lewis & Clark Forest Plan	In-house	Low	As needed
4. Work with towns in the County and surrounding counties to coordinate on their Growth Policy revisions.	In-House	Low	As needed

5. Incorporate Public Outreach & Education Methods into the Planning Process

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Revise development review process to notify interested parties such as watershed groups and State agencies.	Coordinate with Subdivision Revisions		
2. Create checklist and develop guides to clearly explain the various development processes to citizens.	In-House	Low	As needed
3. Work with fire fighting agencies to provide information to homeowners regarding wildfire issues and implement recommendations of CWPP	Partner	Low	On-going

6. Work with County, State and Federal agencies to strengthen or create initiatives and programs to meet the housing and economic development needs of the area.

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
1. Work with schools on youth leadership programs such as a youth commission or government day …	Partner	Low	On-going
2. Continue to work with and support economic development planning through Bear Paw Development Corporation.	Partner	Low	On-going
3. Work with service clubs and banks to assist low income seniors with modifications to homes to meet their needs as they age.	Partner	Low	On-going
4. Conduct housing needs assessment to determine if unincorporated areas in the county can apply for Community Development Block Grant Home Funds to provide housing rehab assistance to unincorporated housing developments in the county.	Contract	Medium	Mid-Term
5. Compile a resource director of weatherization programs and energy audits through state utility companies and senior services.	Partner	Low	Mid-Term
6. Coordinate community clean-up and code enforcement efforts to address issues of blight.	In-house	Medium	On-going

7. Special Planning Initiatives

Action	Staffing	Cost	Priority
Work with Federal, state and non-profit agencies on planning initiatives that impact Chouteau County.	In-house	Low	On-going

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

No single government agency can address all issues in the Growth Policy. Many agencies offer various types of public services and are involved in land use, environmental, and transportation issues. Their activities all need to be coordinated to promote efficient operations, avoid duplication and minimize the potential for conflicts. There are already many examples of coordination and cooperation between agencies. These include sharing information, regular meetings between public officials of agencies, and inviting comment on development proposals.

In addition to coordination of activities, some issues require a joint response from multiple agencies. Agencies may partner on capital construction projects, share staff, conduct joint planning processes or enter intergovernmental agreements on a variety of issues. In some instances, there are regional agencies with representatives from various jurisdictions to provide specific services.

The Montana Code Annotated (76-2-601(3)(g)(ii) specifies:

> " if a governing body is a county, how the governing body will coordinate and cooperate with cities and towns located within the county's boundaries on matters related to the growth policy;"

There are three incorporated towns in Chouteau County (Fort Benton, Big Sandy, and Geraldine). The following policies will direct coordination between the County and these towns.

- The County will provide each town with a copy of the Growth Policy and will meet with local officials upon request to discuss the plan
- The County Planning Board will continue to hear subdivision cases for the towns.
- The County will forward subdivision plats to cities for review pursuant to the requirements of the MCA 76-3-601. The County will notify towns of pending development proposals within 4 miles of the town limits of Fort Benton, Geraldine and Big Sandy.
- The City and County will share meeting agendas and minutes
- The County will encourage towns to adopt individual growth policies for the town and will work with them during the planning process to coordinate policies and implementation strategies
- The County will encourage the towns to incorporate existing facility plans into a capital improvement plan and will support applications for infrastructure grants
- The County and City will share databases and other information in the planning process

In addition to coordination with the towns, the following table lists other agencies that have operations in Chouteau County and activities that will promote intergovernmental coordination.

Table 1: Intergovernmental Coordination

Lewis & Clark National Forest	The update of Forest Plan is to be scheduled in next few years. The County will establish "Cooperating Agency Status" to have more local input on decisions.
State Agencies	Information sharing, public participation, coordinated review processes with the following state agencies: Department of Environmental Quality reviews water & sewer systems. Hazardous waste & solid waste regulations. Water & Air Quality. Department of Transportation maintains State Highways in the County Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Deals with water rights and groundwater issues Fish, Wildlife and Parks – Fishing access sites, state parks
School Districts	Coordinate on new subdivisions. Shared use of facilities. Cooperate on Youth leadership programs
Bear Paw Development Corporation	Economic Development planning for the five counties including Chouteau County. Regular updates, information sharing, assist with land use issues for potential new businesses.
Watershed Groups	Teton River Watershed Groups, Marias River Watershed Group and Missouri River Council. Representative at meetings, information sharing, distribute educational materials to land owners, notify of pending development reviews, invite input on land development regs
Utilities	Northwestern Energy, Hill County Electric, Sun River Electric Coop, Three Rivers Telephone, Charter, Water & Sewer Districts, Solid Waste providers. Information sharing, notify of pending development and development regs.
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	Wetlands, Hazardous Waste. Information sharing. Distribution of educational materials.
Fire Districts	Coordination through the County Department of Emergency Services. Notify of pending developments. Invite input on land development regs
Federal & Regional agencies.	Share planning information. Invite comments during drafting stages of the plan and for development review. Coordinate on regional initiatives. USDA Rural Development Office, RC& D, Opportunity Link, HRDC, Area Council of Aging, North Central MT Transit, Malmstrom Air Force Base, …)
Rocky Boy's Reservation	Share planning information. Invite comments on the plan and for development review. Coordinate on regional initiatives.

REVIEW & UPDATES

Planning is a continuous process. All types of plans must be reviewed and revised on a regular basis to reflect current conditions. Changes in development practices, legislation, grant programs, budgets and numerous other factors may alter priorities or make certain policies outdated. It is important that regular reviews of the Growth Policy Plan be part of the planning program.

1. Schedule for Review

The Montana Code Annotated – Section -76-1-601 requires that the Growth Policy Plan be reviewed every five years. Upon the fifth anniversary of adopting the plan, the Planning Board and staff will undertake a major review process to evaluate plan. The plan will be modified according to public procedures specified in the Montana code. Evaluation criteria include:

- Are the community's goals current and valid?
- Have circumstances, information assumptions, needs or legal framework changed?
- Does additional public input suggest the need for changes?
- Are the community planning process and planning products providing effective direction to local officials and staff?
- Is there new data that should be incorporated into the plan?
- Does the action plan reflect the completion of work items?
- Should new action items be identified and the timeline modified?
- What issues have emerged that the Plan should address?

2. Checklist of Conditions that Require Plan Revisions

There may be times prior to the five-year review that the County would want to revisit certain aspects of the plan and amend specific elements. Conditions under which this may occur include:

- Address issues that come up during implementation phase that may not have been anticipated during the drafting of the plan.
- Reflect new development proposal or building techniques that are not provided for in the plan.
- Modify to comply with changes is state legislation, judicial decisions or state programs.
- Reassess priorities to take advantage of new opportunities such as grants, partnerships, and State and Federal program.

3. Public Participation

Citizen input is the basis for the policies in the plan. Involving citizens helps develops a consensus between various interest groups. Citizens learn more about how government and planning work; how much programs cost; and the difficulty or ease of program implementation. Public outreach provides accurate information on planning issues and gives citizens the opportunity to participate in planning. Citizens will develop ownership of plan and are more likely to support planning efforts. Most importantly, public participation promotes the public interest by involving a cross section of interest groups that will demand fairness and balance in planning policies. General principles for public participation include:

- Must occur at all stages of the planning process
- Must include a variety of techniques to reach a broad audience
- Although not everyone will choose to participate, everyone must have the opportunity to participate if they so desire.
- Must meet legal due process requirements such as notification of meetings, open meetings and appropriate documentation of meetings.

The following techniques were part of the growth policy planning process and will continued to be used in future processes.

Table 2: Public Participation Techniques

Technique	Description
Opinion Surveys	As part of the planning process, Chouteau County conducted a survey to assess resident's priorities and attitudes towards various land use issues. The County will continue to look for partnering opportunities for future planning surveys.
Town Meetings	Upon request, the County will conduct information meetings the three incorporated towns to present the draft plan and obtain public input.
Workshops	Future planning processes may involve workshops to explore specific issues.
Web Publishing	The county will work post an electronic version of the plan on the County web site.
Press Coverage	Periodic press releases sent to local papers in the County.
Comment Period on draft documents	Review copies were available on-line and at the public libraries and at the County courthouse. Parties could submit written comments or attend public meetings.
Public Displays & Exhibits	Future planning processes may include the creation of displays and exhibits that will contain information on the plan.
Present to Civic Groups & Clubs	Upon request, Staff or Planning Board members will present an overview of the Growth Policy Plan to citizen groups.

SUBDIVISION REVIEW

Subdivision is the division of land that creates one or more parcels for the purpose of selling, renting, leasing or conveying the land. In Montana, subdivisions that create parcels containing less than 160 acres (excluding right-of-ways) are subject to the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act (MSPA - MCA 76-3) In addition to the State Code, subdivisions are subject to local regulations. Section MCA 76-3-201 through 76-3-207 list types of land division that may be exempt from local government subdivision review.

Among the requirements in Section 76-1-601 of the Montana Code regarding requirements for growth policies are the following:

(h) a statement explaining how the governing bodies will:
(i) define the criteria in 76-3-608(3)(a); and
(ii) evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria in 76-3-608(3)(a); and

(i) a statement explaining how public hearings regarding proposed subdivisions will be conducted.

The flow chart indicates the public hearing process for reviewing subdivision. The criteria in 76-3-608 (3)(a) will be evaluated in the staff report to the Planning Board and considered as part of the deliberations. Definition of criteria will be reviewed in detail as part of the subdivision regulation updates but will generally reflected the recommended definitions as follows:

4. Definitions of criteria in 76-606(3)(a)

Agriculture - Montana Code Annotated contains definitions for the words "agriculture" and "agricultural" as follows:

41-2-103, MCA Definitions. As used in this part, the following definitions apply:
"Agriculture" means: (a) all aspects of farming, including the cultivation and tillage of the soil; (b)(I) dairying; and (ii) the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities, including commodities defined as agricultural commodities in the federal Agricultural Marketing Act (12 U>S>C> 1141j(g)): (c) the raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals, or poultry; and (d) any practices, including forestry or lumbering operations, performed by a farmer or on a farm as an incident to or in conjunction with farming operations, including preparation for market or delivery to storage, to market, or to carriers for transportation market.
87-8-701, MCA Definitions. Unless the context requires otherwise, in this part the following definitions apply: (1) "Agricultural and food product" includes a horticultural, viticultural, dairy, livestock, poultry, bee, other farm or garden product, fish or fishery product, and other foods.

Agricultural Water User Facilities: Those facilities which provide water for agricultural land as defined in 15-7-202, MCA, or which provide water for the production of agricultural products as defined in 15-1-101, MCA including, but not limited to ditches, pipes, and head gates.

Local Services: Any and all services or facilities that local government entities are authorized to provide.

Natural Environment: The physical conditions which exist within a given area, including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, noise, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance.

Wildlife: Living things which are neither human nor domesticated.

Wildlife Habitat: Place or type of site where wildlife naturally lives and grows.

Public Health and Safety: A condition of optimal well-being, free from danger, risk, or injury for a community at large, or for all people, not merely for the welfare of a specific individual or a small class of persons.

5. Evaluation of Subdivisions

As required by *76-3-608(3)(A) MCA—CRITERIA FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW,* and as the primary criteria, all proposed subdivisions are evaluated for their effect on agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, natural environment, wildlife and wildlife habitat, and public health and safety, along with all other elements of the Growth Policy. The purpose of this review is to determine if there are significant, unmitigated, adverse impacts. The governing body can deny a subdivision if adverse impacts associated with the development are not appropriately mitigated.

The following six criteria are examples of items considered in evaluating the overall impact of a proposed subdivision. These examples do not reflect all potential items, but they do include a preponderance of the items under consideration, and some items may not apply to all subdivisions. In addition, some proposals may require evaluation of the effects of other items not included in these examples on these criteria. It is the subdivider's responsibility to document proposed mitigation of any adverse impacts in these critical areas.

Effect on agriculture, including but not limited to:

- Historic and current agricultural productivity and profitability
- Impact on productivity of adjacent farm operations (e.g., access for agricultural machinery, water available for irrigation or livestock)
- Prime agricultural land (soils as defined by the Natural Resources Conservation Services, NRCS)
- Prime rangeland (soils as defined by NRCS)

Effect on agricultural water user facilities, including but not limited to:

- Water availability to agricultural water users
- Access for maintenance of facilities
- Reasonable and prudent precautions to prevent injury to children who may be attracted to play in the area of the agricultural water user facility
- Liability resulting from proximity to agricultural water user facilities (e.g., blowouts, flooding,

artificially elevated high groundwater)
Impact on owners of the agricultural water user facility

Effect on local services, including but not limited to:

Logical expansion of local services and public facilities
Level of service to meet demand.
Provision of adequate local services and public facilities simultaneous or prior to onset of impact
Location and provision of multi-modal transportation facilities; including pedestrian and bicycle safety measures, and interconnectivity
Fiscal impact relating to cost of local services and public facilities, for all stages of development including projected future subdivision

Effect on natural environment, including but not limited to:

Runoff reaching surface waters (e.g., streams, rivers, riparian areas)
Impacts on ground water supply, quantity, and quality
Impacts on air quality
Impacts on scenic resources
Noxious weeds
Wetlands not covered under nationwide permits
Light pollution on adjacent property

Effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat, including but not limited to:

Loss of significant, important and critical habitat, as defined.
Impacts on significant, important and critical habitat.

Effect on public health and safety, including but not limited to:

Creation of potential man-made hazards (e.g. unsafe road intersection, development in wildland residential interface fire areas)
Demonstration of freedom from natural hazards (e.g. wildfire, flooding, steep slopes)
Existing potential man-made hazards (e.g. high pressure gas lines, lack of fire protection, cumulative impacts)
Traffic safety
Emergency vehicle access
Emergency medical and law enforcement response time
Cumulative impacts on groundwater from individual sewage disposal systems or individual wells
Any other item that endangers public health and safety

6. Public Hearings

Public hearings follow a general process that allows an opportunity for public input. The general steps are as follows:

1) Introduce public hearing.

2) Planning Department staff report.
3) Applicant presentation.
4) Public testimony.
5) Applicant rebuttal.
6) Close public testimony.
7) Board discussion.
8) Recommendation or decision.

Additional public comment may not be submitted after the close of public testimony, unless additional information is submitted by the applicant that substantially changes the application and the governing body specifically requests additional public comment.

Board determination of conformance with the Growth Policy is based on all other elements of the Growth Policy, including the evaluation of the criteria listed in *76-3-608(3)(A) MCA—CRITERIA FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW*.

POPULATION

OVERVIEW

- Population in Chouteau County peaked in 1920 at 11,051 and has declined over the last century to the current population of 5,767 in 2015.
- The population in Chouteau County has stabilized since 2000. The population is projected slowly decline over the next 20 years with a projected population of 5,339 in 2035.
- The declining population is due to a number of factors including fewer births, fewer farm workers due to more efficient agricultural methods and regional growth patterns.
- The population density in Chouteau County is only 1.3 persons per square mile. Demographers generally consider counties with less than 2 persons per square mile "Frontier".
- Almost 40% of the population lives in incorporated towns while the remaining 60% are distributed among the agricultural area and unincorporated towns.
- Since 2000, Chouteau County has experienced a negative natural increase in population (more deaths than births.)
- With 21.8% of the population classified as American Indian, the county is more diverse than the remainder of the State.
- The median age in Chouteau County is higher than the rest of the State. There is a growing number of elderly over the age of 65. It is projected that by the year 2035, 39.8% of the county population will be over age 65..
- Factors affecting future population growth include trends in adjacent Cascade and Hill Counties, Rocky Boy's Reservation and out-migration.
- The number of people with disabilities in the county is slightly lower than statewide averages.
- Since 2000, there has been in increase in non-family households, householders living alone and households with persons over age 65.

1. Population Change

The population of Chouteau County peaked in 1920 at 11,051. With the exception of the 1960's and 2000's, the population has declined every decade. During the period from 2000 to 2008, Chouteau County experienced a population decrease of 9%. This compared to a 9.3% positive growth rate statewide over the same 8-year period. The population of 5,225 in 2008 ranked 33 among the 56 counties in the State.

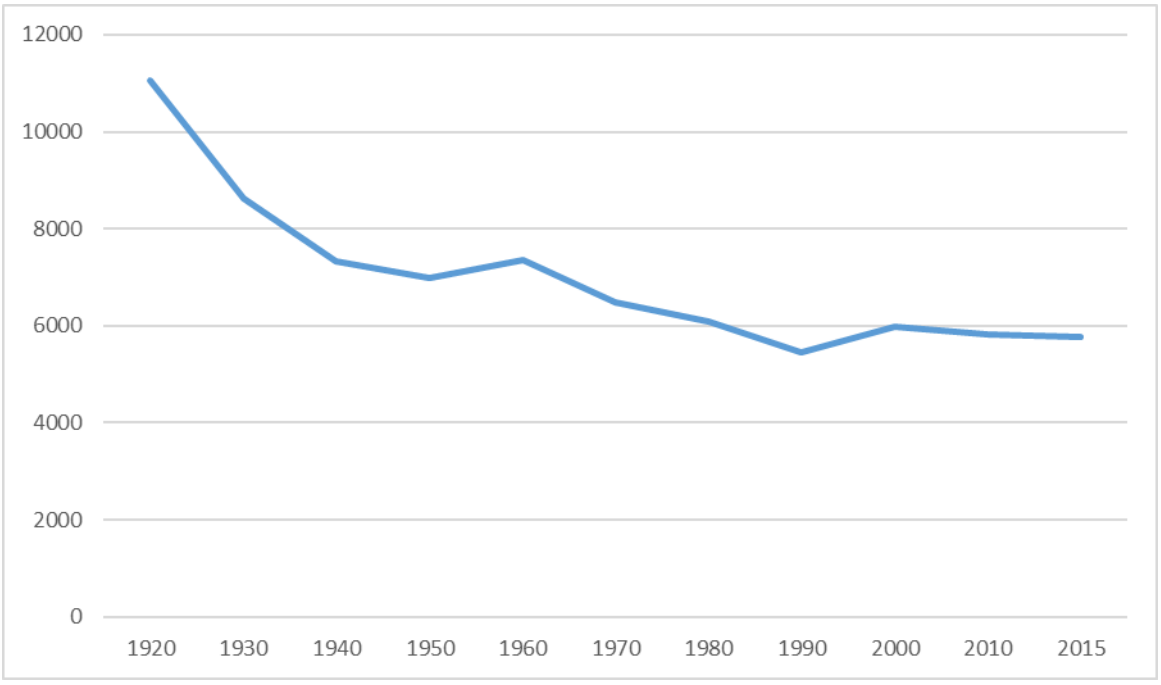
Table 1: Census Population 1920 to 2015 - Chouteau County

1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015
11,051	8,635	7,326	6,974	7,348	6,473	6,092	5,452	5,970	5,813	5,767
--	(- 22%)	(- 15%)	(- 5%)	5%	(- 12%)	(- 6%)	(- 11%)	9.5%	(-2.5%)	(-0.7%)

Source: United States Census Bureau - Census of the Population

A number of factors contribute to the population decline in the county. Demographic factors include declining birth rates and smaller household sizes. With more efficient agricultural methods, fewer families are required to operate a farm. Additionally, a significant amount of land is out of production in the Conservation Reserve Program. Consequently, there was less expenditures on agricultural supplies. This results in fewer families having to support local businesses and also has had a cyclical effect of loss of businesses, jobs and income. The economic recession in 2008 also negatively affected the housing market and population growth.

Figure 1: Population Change in Chouteau County 1920 – 2015



Examining population trends in adjoining counties provides other insights on the dynamics of population growth in the region. Of the eight adjoining counties, two counties experienced population slight population since 2010. Cascade and Hill Counties had the highest population growth rates in the region during this period. If these counties experience significant job growth, it could result in additional commuting between the counties and Chouteau County.

Table 2: Census Population Change 2010 – 2015 Adjacent Counties

County	2010	2015	% Change
Cascade	81,327	82,278	1.2%
Pondera	6,153	6,184	0.5%
Teton	6,073	6,104	0.5%
Judith Basin	2,072	1,926	(-0.7%)
Hill	16,096	16,572	3.0%
Blaine	6,491	6,577	1.3%
Fergus	11,586	11,427	(-1.3%)
Liberty	2,339	2,408	2.9%

Source: United States Census Bureau - Census of the Population & American Community Survey

2. Population Projections

Population projections for Chouteau County indicate a decline of population over the next 20 years. Population projections tend to reflect recent growth patterns. Throughout the State, high growth counties over the past decade are projected to have continued high growth while Counties that have had little or negative growth are projected to continue with this pattern over the next 20 years. Projections can change dramatically due to unanticipated gains or losses in the employment sector and changes in the region. If adjoining Cascade County experiences sudden job growth, Chouteau County will likely receive some reciprocal growth.

Table 3: Population Projections, Chouteau County Montana

Year	Population
2010	5813
2020	5708
2025	5562
2030	5433
2035	5338

Source: Montana Department of Commerce Census and Economic Information Center

3. Components of Population Change

Changes in population numbers are the result of births, deaths, and people moving into or out of the area. Since 2000, the number of births has fluctuated but they are still significantly less than in 1980. The number of deaths has generally remained steady over the years with a spike to 2000 before returning to more normal levels. Although 2000 was somewhat of an anomaly, the overall trend towards fewer births and a slightly higher number of deaths resulting in negative natural increase for the county.

Table 4: Components of Population Change: 1980-2014

Year	1980	1990	1995	2000	2007	2010	2014
Births	99	62	56	35	44	39	55
Deaths	58	52	53	78	63	53	64
Net Change	+ 41	+ 10	+ 3	(- 43)	(- 19)	(-14)	(-9)

Source: Montana Dept. of Public Health and Human Services,
http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/Epidemiology/OESS-VS#223953338-annual-report

4. Population by Location

According to the 2015 population estimates, approximately 40% of the population lives within the city limits of the incorporated towns of Fort Benton, Big Sandy, and Geraldine. Population in the towns and in the unincorporated areas were relatively stable between 2010 and 2015.

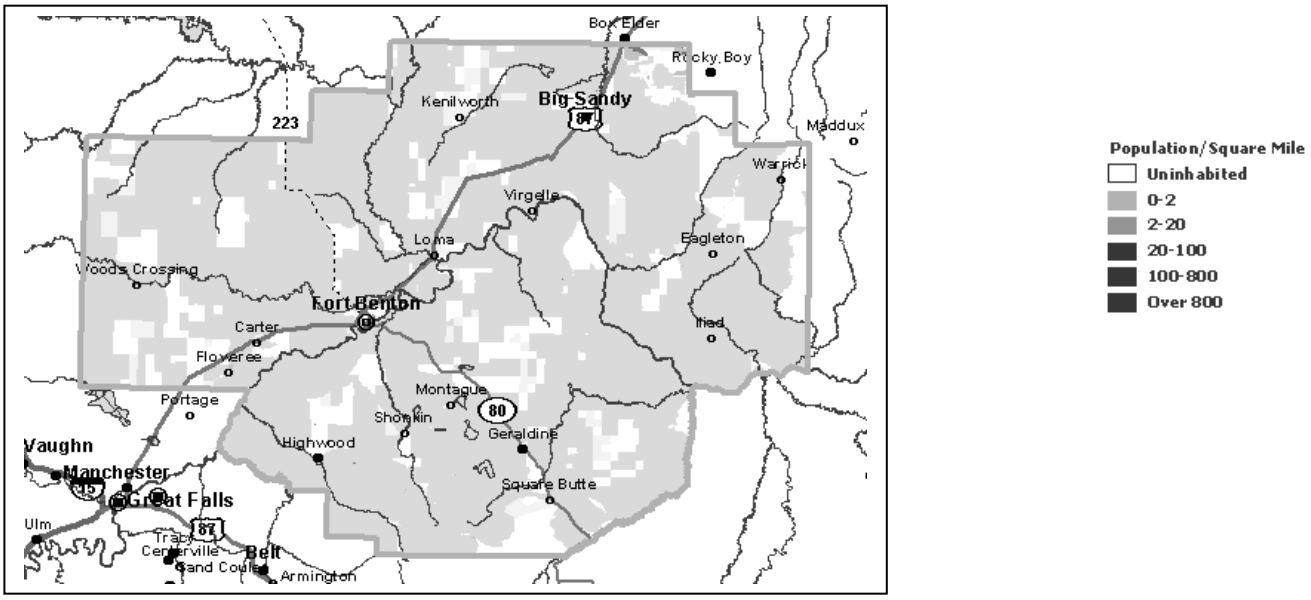
Table 5: Population by Towns & Unincorporated Places

Location	Population 2010	Population 2015	% Change
Fort Benton	1464	1460	(-0.2%)
Big Sandy	598	593	(-0.8%)
Geraldine	261	263	0.7%
Unincorporated Other	3490	3451	(-0.7%)
Total	5813	5767	(0.7%)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau – Population of the Census, Montana Dept. of Commerce – Population Projections

At 3, 973 s quare m iles, C houteau C ounty is t he 10th largest c ounty i n l and ar ea in the S tate. The av erage population density in the county is 1.3 persons per s quare mile c ompared t o a state a verage of 6.8 persons per square mile. Demographers consider counties with less than 2 people per square mile as "frontier" counties. While just less t han half of the popu lation concentrated i n cities, the remaining population is di stributed among unincorporated towns and ranches with pockets of uninhabited areas.

Figure 2: Population Density per Square Mile



Source: Montana Natural Resource Information (NRIS) Geographic Information System

5. Race & Ethnicity

The population of Chouteau County is predominantly white (75.8%) with American Indians comprising the largest minority group.

Table 6: Population by Race - Chouteau County

Race	Population	Percent
White	4409	75.8%
Black or African American	3	0.1%
American Indian or Alaskan native	1267	21.8%
Asian	21	0.4%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	6	0.1%
Other	16	0.3%
Two or more races	91	1.6%
Hispanic or Latino(of any race)	94	1.6%

Source: U.S. Census of the Population - 2010

6. Age Distribution

The median age in Chouteau County in 2014 was 41.1 years. This is greater than the statewide median age of 39.8. Between 2000 and 2010, the County population age 65 and over comprised 17.3% of the population compared to 14.8% statewide. The Montana Census and Information Center projects that in the year 2030, 29.8% of the county's population will be over 65 years of age.

Table 7: Population by Age - Chouteau County

Under 5 years	415	7.1%
5 to 9 years	431	7.4%
10 to 14 years	413	7.1%
15 to 19 years	433	7.4%
20 to 24 years	288	5.0%
25 to 29 years	283	4.9%
30 to 34 years	274	4.7%
35 to 39 years	265	4.6%
40 to 44 years	317	5.5%
45 to 49 years	394	6.8%
50 to 54 years	452	7.8%
55 to 59 years	471	8.1%
60 to 64 years	369	6.3%
65 to 69 years	288	5.0%
70 to 74 years	225	3.9%
75 to 79 years	195	3.4%
80 to 84 years	152	2.6%
85 years and over	148	2.5%

Source: U.S. Census of the Population - 2010

7. Education

In Chouteau County, the percentage of people with less than a high school is higher than the state average while the percentage of persons with a Bachelor's degree or higher is comparable to the State. The percentage of high schools graduates is higher in the incorporated towns than in the remainder of the county.

Table 8: Education Levels - Chouteau County

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Montana	Chouteau County	Fort Benton	Big Sandy	Geraldine
Less than High School	14.9%	30.3%	7.8%	5.5%	11.0%
High School	32.1%	27.9%	40.3%	42.9%	32.6%
Some College or Associates Degree	46.1%	34.5%	29.6%	29.6%	36.6%
Bachelor's Degree or higher	6.9%	7.4%	22.0%	22.0%	19.7%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey -2010 - 2013

8. Disability

The U.S. Census includes the following categories for disabilities.

- Sensory Disability - blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment
- Physical Disability - a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying
- Mental Disability - learning, remembering, or concentrating
- Self-Care Disability - dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home
- Mobility Disability - going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office
- Employment Disability - working at a job or business

According to this definition, Census data indicates that 10% of the population in Chouteau County had a disability compared to 13.1% statewide. The percentage of seniors over age 65 experiencing a disability 25.7% in the county was also lower than the state average of 36.4%. As the population ages, the demands for specialized housing to accommodate individuals with disabilities will increase.

Table 9: Disability Status for Chouteau County

	Chouteau County	State of Montana
% of Population with Disability	10.0%	13.1%
% of Population over age 65 with Disability	25.7%	36.4%

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2013

9. Household Characteristics

The percentage of family households declined from 72% of all households in 2000 to 68% of all households in 2010. The number of female headed households, householders living alone and households with members over age 65 all increased from 2000 to 2010. The number of households with individuals under age 18 decreased over this time period.

Table 10: Household Characteristics – Chouteau County

HOUSEHOLDS BY TYPE	**2000**	**2010**
Total households	2226	2294
Family households (families)	1614	1560
With own children under 18 years	757	710
Female householder, no husband present	186	231
With own children under 18 years	121	177
Nonfamily households	612	734
Householder living alone	554	667
Households with individuals under 18 years	807	715
Households with individuals 65 years and over	635	705
Average household size	2.59	2.48
Average family size	3.11	3.04

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census of the Population - 2010

ECONOMY

OVERVIEW

- Per capita income fluctuates considerably depending on agricultural production and crop prices. In 2014, per capita income was 78%of the national average.
- Median household income was lower in Chouteau County 2014 than 2009 and was lower than most of the surrounding counties.
- 21.61% of the people in the County were living below poverty levels in from 2010 to 2014 compared to 15.6% statewide. . Under age 18, 34.8% were in the poverty range.
- The unemployment rate in Chouteau County was 2.8% in May, 2016 compared to 4.2% for the State. Chouteau County unemployment is typically lower than the State average. The national unemployment rate in May, 2016 was 4.7%.
- Health/social service employment represented the largest non-public industry. There was noticeable decine in the retail trade and accommodations/food service sectors between 2007 and 2014.
- Tourism is becoming an increasingly important sector of the economy. Spending on outfitter/guides comprised largest portion of tourism spending.
- Chouteau County is among the top County in the State in wheat production. Actual yields vary depending on growing conditions. Barley and hay are the next two most prevalent crops. There was an increase in acreage planted in peas and lentils since 2007.
- The number of farms declined from 2007 to 2012. The average size farm is 2677 acres and is larger than the statewide average.
- In 2012, almost one-third of farm operators listed “other” as their primary occupation.
- Farm expenses increased in all categories from 2007 to 2012. The value of agricultural products also increased.
- Cattle is the predominant livestock in the county.
- Fewer farms are participating in CRP since 2007.

1. Income (Per Capita)

The per capita income in Chouteau County fluctuates considerably depending on agricultural production. In 2009, the per capita income was 98% of the national average. In 2009, per capita income reached its highest level at $39,374. After experiencing a persistent drought combined with lower crop prices since 1997, agricultural output remained at below average levels and, by 2000, per capita income had fallen to 62% of the national average. This trend of fluctuating incomes is typical of surrounding rural counties that also have economies based on agriculture.

Table 1: Chouteau County Per Capita Income in comparison to Montana & Nation

Year	Chouteau	Montana	U.S.	Chouteau % of National Average	Montana % of National Average
1990	$20,600	$15,516	$19,572	105%	79%
2000	$18,426	$22,961	$29,760	62%	77%
2009	$39,374	$34,622	$40,116	114%	98%
2014	$31,079	$39,903	$46,049	78%	67%

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis

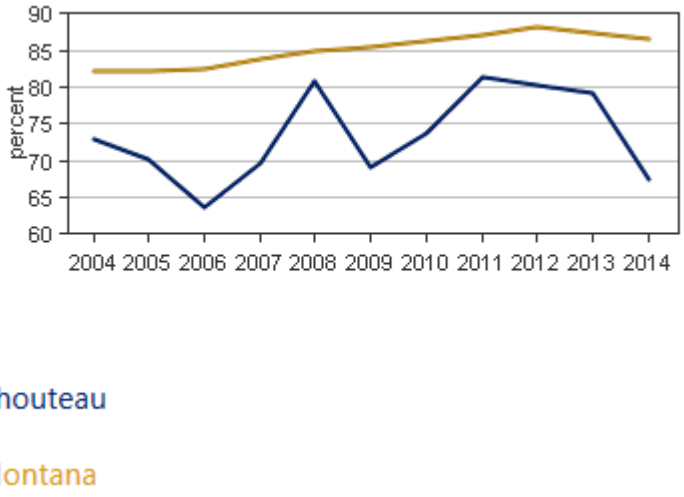
Table 2: 2014 Per Capita Income of surrounding counties to Chouteau County

County	Per Capita Income	% of Montana Average	% of National Average
Cascade	$41,163	103%	89%
Pondera	$41,110	103%	89%
Teton	$46,056	113%	98%
Judith Basin	$50,518	127%	110%
Hill	$38,348	96%	83%
Blaine	$27,934	70%	61%
Fergus	$38,108	96%	83%
Liberty	$36,686	92%	80%

Source: U.S Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis – BEAR Facts

According to the U.S. Census, American Community Survey, the median household income in Chouteau County from 2010 to 2014 was $41,720. This was lower than the statewide median income of $46,766 during this same time period.

Figure 1: Per Capita Income in Chouteau County from 1995 to 2014



Source: http://www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts/action.cfm?geoType=4&fips=30015&areatype=30015

2. Farm Income

Farm income indicates the dramatic difference between high yield crop years and low yield years. In 2007, the average sales per farms was significantly less than 2012 while farm expenses were significantly higher. Government payments and miscellaneous income, meanwhile, remained relatively the same. The value of farm land in buildings in Chouteau County on average is higher than the state average.

Table 3: Farm Income, Expenses, and Value

	2007	2012	Montana 2012
Total Sales – Average per Farm	$173,113	$240,424	$151,031
Total Farm Expenses – Average per Farm	$124,346	$195,125	$125,542
Net Cash Farm Income – Avg. per Farm	$82,515	$84,988	$34,102
Govt. Payments – Average per Farm	$27,918	$26,519	$16,865
Estimated Market Value of Land and Buildings – Average per Farm	$1,803,549	$2,146,670	$1,674,568

Source: U.S Census of Agriculture – 2007 & 2012

3. Poverty & Low Income

According to Census Data, 21.6% of the population of Chouteau County is below the poverty level, with 25.5% of people under 34.8% below the poverty line. Overall poverty rates in the County are higher than the state average.

Table 4: Estimated Number and Percent People of All Ages in Poverty – 2010-2014

% in Poverty	Chouteau County	Montana
All ages in poverty	21.6%	15.3%
Under Age 18 in poverty	34.8%	19.9%
Ages 65+	6.3%	8.3%
Median Household Income	$41,270	$46,766

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

4. Labor Force

The unemployment rate for Chouteau County in 2010 was 4.1% and was lower than the State average of 7.1%. Chouteau County typically has lower unemployment than the State. The National unemployment rate average was considerably higher at 9.8%. In 2009, Montana's unemployment rate was the 4th lowest in the nation.

Table 5: 2009 Annual Area Labor Force Statistics

Civilian Labor Force	2,643
Employment	2,569
Unemployment	74
Unemployment Rate	2.8%

Source: Montana Department of Labor & Industry, Research and Analysis Bureau – May, 2016

5. Top Employers

Education, health, and government represent the top employers in the County. The agricultural sector is another major employer with new facilities in Carter such as Columbia Grn and EGT Grain Elevator.

Table 6: Top Employers in Chouteau County

	# Employees
Missouri River Medical Center	100+
Fort Benton School District	65 FTE & 30 Part Time
Chouteau County	76
Big Sandy Activities	50-99
Big Sandy Medical Center	50-99
Mountain View Coop	20-49
Grand Union Hotel	20-49
First Security Bank	10-19
Harvest States	10-19
IX Ranch	10-19
Jim Taylor Motors	10-19
Montana Flour & Grain	10-19
Price-Rite Food Farm	10-19

Source: Montana Dept. of Labor and Industry, http://lmi.mt.gov/Employment/qcewTop

6. Industry by Type

From 2007 to 2014 the largest employment sector was Health Care and Social assistance. There was a noticeable decrease in the retail trade and accommodations/food service sectors.

Table 7: Employment by Major Industry – Chouteau County

Industry	2014	2007
Construction	(b)	123
Manufacturing	(b)	47
Wholesale Trade	82	77
Retail Trade	110	274
Transportation & Warehousing	(a)	46
Information	(a)	(D)
Finance and Insurance	(b)	(D)
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	3	(D)
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	12	(D)
Health Care & Social Assistance	(e)	187
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	(a)	50
Accommodations & Food Services	81	151
Other Services	20	(d)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns

Notes: 1. D= Not shown to avoid disclosure of confidential information
2. (a) = 0-19 employees (b) = 20-99 employees (e) = 250-499 employees

7. Economic Development Resources

Bear Paw Development Corporation is based in Havre, MT and is nonprofit corporation incorporated under the laws of Montana in 1968. U.S. Department of Commerce, approved funding for the organization, and in March 1968, EDA officially designated the Bear Paw Economic Development District. Currently, Hill, Blaine, Liberty, Phillips, and Chouteau Counties, the incorporated communities of Big Sandy, Chinook, Chester, Fort Benton, Harlem, Havre, and Malta, along with the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations and the Little Shell Tribe make up the District's participating governments. In 2012, Bear Paw updated the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The update involved extensive input from residents throughout the five county region. The CEDS identified five major economic development goals for the region.

1. Create economic opportunity and enhance local capacity of the Fort Belknap and Rocky Boy's Indian Reservations.
2. Maintain and enhance the physical infrastructure of the District.
3. Assist in the development of value-added agricultural projects.
4. Attract and support entrepreneurs and help create job opportunities for the underemployed and unemployed.
5. Continually provide economic development planning services to District members.
6. Sustain and enhance the development and delivery of our region's natural and renewable resources.

8. Tourism

A. Economic Impact

Tourism has become an increasingly important sector in the State of Montana's economy and is now one of the leading industries in the State. According to data from the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research (ITTR) 59% of nonresident expenditures in Chouteau County was for Outfitter – Guide Services. Restaurant-bar and retail were the next two largest categories of spending.

Table 8: Nonresident Expenditures for Chouteau County - 2014

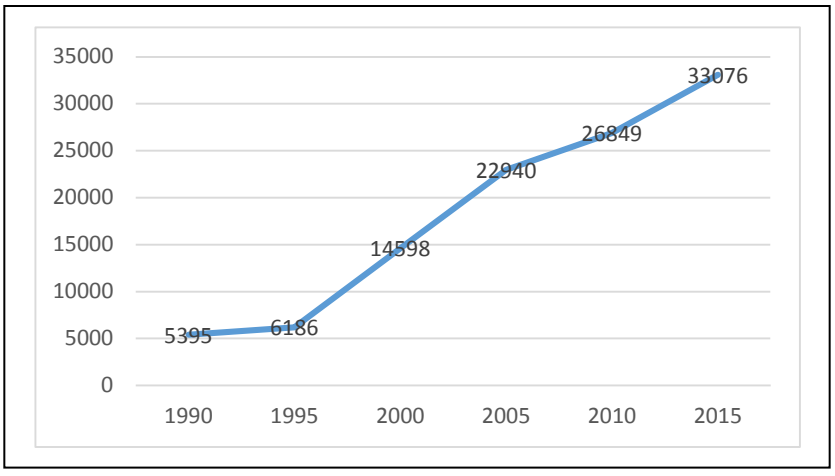
	Expenditures	% of County
Campground	$17,000	0.5%
Gas, Diesel	$176,000	5%
Grocery, Snacks	$41,000	1.2%
Hotel, Motel, B&B	$201,000	5.7%
License, Fees	$7,000	0.2%
Outfitter, Guide	$2,096,000	59.1%
Rental Cabin	$22,000	0.6%
Restaurant, Bar	$585,000	16.5%
Retail	$404,4000	11.4%

Source: Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, University of Montana

B. Lodging Revenues

Figure 2 indicates that the lodging tax revenues have steadily increased since 1990.

Figure 2 : Lodging Tax Revenue Collections – Chouteau County



Source: Montana Department of Commerce Montana Promotion Division

C. Attractions

The following table indicates the variety of attractions for visitors to the county.

Table 9: Tourism Destinations in Chouteau County

Big Sandy	• Big Sandy Historical Museum
Fort Benton	• Chouteau County Fair • Fort Benton, State Historic Site • Grand Union Hotel, Historic Hotel • Lewis and Clark Memorial, Monument-Fort Benton • Museum of the Northern Great Plains • Museum of the Upper Missouri • Montana Agricultural Center • Shep Memorial • Old Fort Museum • Bureau of Land Management Visitor Center • Summer Celebration
Geraldine	• Geraldine Milwaukee Depot, Registered Historic Site & Museum
Loma	• Decision Point, Loma - Landmark • Earth Science Museum

Trails

1) Lewis and Clark Trail - This trail follows the route taken by the expedition as they explored westward along the Missouri River. Trail highlights in Chouteau County include:

   - Upper Missouri National Wild & Scenic River and National Monument - 149-mile segment of the Missouri River much of it unchanged since the Lewis & Clark exploration.
   - Fort Benton - Beside this historic stretch of river, the State of Montana Lewis and Clark Memorial stands watch on the levee. Fort ruins, museums and buildings align a path for a self-guided tour along the trail.
   - Decision Point - At the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers, the Corps had to choose the correct route west - one mile off US 87 near Loma.

2) Whoop-Up Trail in its heyday - This trail was carved by bootleggers and traders transporting illegal whiskey and goods across the US/Canadian border. Later, merchants and businesses bartered for legal supplies along this major thoroughfare.

3) Old Forts Trail - This supply wagon trail marks the sites of early settlements of traders who transported goods from Fort Benton to Canada.

4) Mullan Trail. First military road in the west. Ran from Fort Benton to Fort Walla Walla, Washington.

Recreation Areas

- Coal Banks Landing & State Recreation Area - Located on the Upper Missouri National Wild & Scenic River, Lewis & Clark National Forest - Highwood Mountains, Hiking, Biking, Camping
- Square Butte Natural Area - National Natural Landmark, Hiking & Wildlife Viewing
- Judith Landing & Recreation Area

Source: Compiled from State of Montana (www.visitmt.com), University of Montana - Institute of Tourism & Recreation Research, & Chouteau County Comprehensive Plan - 1997, Yellow Pages - 2004

9. Agriculture

Table 10 indicates that the number of farms increased between 2007 and 2012. The amount of land in farms has remained also decreased during this period. While the average size of farms in Chouteau County and overall in the state of Montana experienced a decrease over the last 10 years, the average size of County farm was still larger in land area than the statewide average.

Between 1997 and 2002, the drought had a major impact on agricultural production. The average market value of products was significantly lower and the number of farms with annual sales of less than $5000 greatly increased. The production level has since rebounded from its 2002 low and the largest number of farms had sales over $100,000.

Table 10: Agricultural Statistics for Chouteau County

Farms	**1992**	**1997**	**2002**	**2007**	**2012**
Number of Farms	737	819	787	849	774
Land in Farms (acres)	2,277,936	2,247,664	2,301,376	2,277,842	2,071,771
Average Size (acres)					
Chouteau County	3,091	2,744	2,924	2,683	2,677
Montana	2,613	2,115	2,139	2,079	2,134
Number of Farms by Sales					
Under $5,000	102	107	270	300	242
$5,000 – $9,999	42	29	37	15	17
$10,000 - $99,999	390	279	304	156	120
$100,000 or more	199	335	176	378	390
Farms with income from agri-tourism or recreation	n/a	n/a	n/a	21	16

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

In 2012, there were 489 farms in Chouteau County that exceeded 1000 acres in size, which was more than all the other sizes. This has historically been the case although there has also been a general increase in the number of smaller farms - except at the Under 10 level.

Table 11: Classification of Farms According to Size

Size (Acres)	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Under 10	39	9	5	5	10	17
10 - 49	12	11	16	29	30	26
50 - 179	15	28	38	57	65	67
180 - 499	54	52	61	94	127	79
500 - 999	79	58	77	80	94	96
1000+	596	579	553	522	523	489
Total	**795**	**737**	**750**	**787**	**849**	**774**

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

Cropland comprised the largest percentage of use of land for farms. The amount of cropland actually harvested, however, varies depending on growing conditions.

Table 12: Classification of Cropland According to Use

Land Types (Acres)	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Crop (Total)	1,297,630	1,363,628	1,310,448	1,363,628	1,260,269
Harvested	554,420	757,213	623,170	623,170	592,634
Pasture (All types)	969,706	824,140	932,198	959,405	738,724
Woodland	15,484	14,697	16,626	16,043	32,621

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

The percentage of farms that are operated by full owners has increased from 1992 to 2007 but decreased over the last five years. The average age of farm operators had been increasing for a number of past decades and reflects the average aging of Montana citizens. The number of farm operators whose principal occupation is other than farming increased since 2007.

Table 13: Farm Operator Characteristics

	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012
Tenure of Operator					
Full Owner	204	289	341	392	342
Part Owner	374	374	339	334	316
Tenant	159	156	107	123	116
Principal Occupation					
Farming	650	667	666	572	539
Other	87	152	121	180	235
Average Age	50.7	53.1	52.8	57.8	58.8

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1992, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

The number of farms decreased from 2007 to 2012. The land in farms also decreased slightly over the last five years.

Table 14: Farm Characteristics

	2007	2012	% Change
Number of Farms	849	774	(-9%)
Land in Farms (acres)	2,277,842	2.071,771	(-9%)
Average Size of Farms (acres)	2,683	2,677	(-0.2%)

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 2002 and 2007

In all categories, farm expenses increased in the last 5 years with the largest increase in feed and livestock. On average, production expenses increased by 36% per farm in the last five years.

Table 15: Selected Farm Production Expenses

	1997	2002	2007	2012
Livestock & Poultry	$1,248,000	$1,482,000	$3,000,000	$6,763,000
Feed	$1,941,000	$2,681,000	$3,216,000	$7,048,000
Seeds, bulbs, plants & trees	$2,475,000	$2,851,000	$2,632,000	$5,267,000
Farm Labor	$4,761,000	$5,960,000	$6,101,000	$8,619,000
Gas & Other Petroleum Products	$6,714,000	$4,582,000	$9,491,000	$10,526,000
Total *	$77,389,000	$71,332,000	$105,570,000	$151,027,000
Average Per Farm	$94,261	$90,753	$124,000	$195,125

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

** Includes Rent, Interest, Utilities & Taxes*

While overall farm expenses changed dramatically, the value of products also experienced increases. Crops comprised the largest source of agricultural products sold in the valley.

Table 16: Value of Agricultural Products Sold

	1997	2002	2007	2012
Crops including nursery products & hay	$83,406,000	$41,918,000	$123,716,000	$159,038,000
Livestock, Poultry & their products	$14,465,000	$13,727,000	$23,527,000	$29,050,000
Total	$97,871,000	$55,644,000	$147,243,000	$188,088,000
Average per farm	$119,501	$55,644	$173,432	$240,424

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

Cattle remain the most prevalent livestock in the county.

Table 17: Number of Farms by Type of Livestock Produced

	1997	2002	2007	2012
Cattle & Calves	279	229	228	207
Hogs & Pigs	15	23	11	5
Poultry	4	--	20	22
Sheep	19	18	14	19
Milk Cows	--	7	--	3

Source: U.S. Census of Agriculture 1997, 2002, 2007, 2012

Table 17 presents the number and bushels per acre of crops harvested for the indicated years. The bushels per acre for winter wheat was the highest in 2008 at 48.5 bushels. Chouteau County is ranks among the top county in the state for winter wheat production. The range of bushels per acres of winter wheat, spring wheat, barley and oats varies widely for each year. In contrast, the hay production is relatively constant. The amount of cropland for peas and lentils has increased since 2007 with 1400 acres planted in lentils in 2012 and 8,068 planted in peas in 2012.

Table 18: Crop Production

Crop	Year	Total Acres Harvested	Yield (Bushels per Acre)	Production Bushels
Winter Wheat	**2015**	410,000	47.5	19,460,000
	2008	423,800	48.5	20,512,000
	2002	159,000	30	4,769,000
	2001	180,000	15	2,709,000
	1991	326,000	49	15,993,000
Spring Wheat	**2015**	91,000	33.4	4,271,000
	2008	82,500	27	2,244,000
	2002	138,000	11	1,467,000
	2001	352,000	16	5,742,000
	1991	84,900	32	2,736,000
Barley	**2015**	78,800	48.7	3,740,000
	2008	35,000	38	1,342,000
	2002	33,200	16	515,000
	2001	72,500	24	1,722,000
	1991	175,000	51	8,890,000
Oats	**2015**	402	46.7	--
	2008	700	39	27,000
	2002	300	13	4000
	2001	1,100	38	42,000
	1991	1,900	53	101,000
Hay (Yield in Tons)	**2012**	30,488	1.45	--
	2008	37,000	1.4	51,800
	2002	33,500	1.52	51,000
	2001	44,500	1.53	68,300
	1991	30,000	1.98	59,500

Source: Montana Agricultural Statistics Service

10. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) & other Conservation Programs

There are a number of other USDA programs to assist people with their conservation needs. These programs offer technical assistance or include cost-share funds to implement various conservation practices. All programs are voluntary. Some other cost-share programs relevant to Teton County include:

Conservation Reserve Program
The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a land conservation program administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA). In exchange for a yearly rental payment, farmers enrolled in the program agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. Contracts for land enrolled in CRP are 10-15 years in length. The long-term goal of the program is to re-establish valuable land cover to help improve water quality, prevent soil erosion, and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) pays a yearly rental payment in exchange for farmers removing environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and planting species that will improve environmental quality.

Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), an offshoot of CRP, targets high-priority conservation issues identified by government and non-governmental organizations. Farm land that falls under these conservation issues is removed from production in exchange for annual rental payments.

Farmable Wetlands Program
The Farmable Wetlands Program (FWP) is designed to restore wetlands and wetland buffer zones that are farmed. FWP gives farmers and ranchers annual rental payments in return for restoring wetlands and establishing plant cover.

As contracts have expired, some land has been returned to crop production. As indicated below, fewer farms are participating in the program since 2007.

Table197 : Statistics on County farms participating in the Conservation Reserve, Wetlands Reserve, Farmable Wetlands and Total Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program

	2007	2012
Number of Farms	443	322
Total acreage in programs	273,898	175,967
Total CRP Payments ($1000s)	$9,602	$6,284

Source: Source: USDA National Agriculture Statistic Service, Census of Agriculture, 2012, Tables 5 & 8

HOUSING

OVERVIEW

- According to the U.S. Census, 51% of housing units were located in unincorporated areas in the county.
- According to the Montana Building and Industry Association, there were 77 homes constructed from 2005 to 2015.
- According to the U.S. Census data, while about 585 (20%) of housing units in Chouteau County are vacant, only 22% of these units are for sale or rent.
- Single-family homes comprise 82% of the housing stock and mobile homes comprise 12.2% of the housing stock. Multi-family units comprise only 5.5% of the housing stock.
- Almost half of the homes in Chouteau County were constructed before 1960 compared to 29% statewide. Older homes have issues with deferred maintenance, lead paint, accessibility, energy efficiency and lack of modern features.
- Home value and home sales in Chouteau County are comparable to other rural counties in the region. Rents are the lowest in the region and state.
- About 39% of renters are experiencing some cost burden in the County.
- Housing assistance is available through a number of state and federal programs.

1. Number of Housing Units County Wide

According to the U.S. Census, 49% of housing units in Chouteau County were located in the towns while 51% were located in unincorporated areas. Since 2000 the number of housing units increased by 3.5% or 105 housing units.

Table 1: County Wide Urban and Rural Housing and Population

Geographic Area	# Housing Units	% of Housing Units
Chouteau County	2,881	100%
Fort Benton	,797	28%
Big Sandy	346	12%
Geraldine	261	9%
Remainder of County	1,477	51%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census. American Community Survey – 2010 - 2014

2. Housing Starts

According to the Montana Building and Industry Association, there were 77 homes constructed from 2005 to 2015. Housing starts peaked in 2007 and 2008 with a high of 11 units in 2007. Housing starts dropped in 2009, due to the economic downturn but rebounded to normal levels in 2010.

Table 2: Chouteau County Housing Starts

Year	Number – Single Family
2005	6
2006	7
2007	11
2008	8
2009	2
2010	9
2011	4
2012	8
2013	6
2014	9
2015	7

Source: Montana Building and Industry Association

3. Vacancy Rate

In 2010, vacant units comprised about 20% of the housing stock in the County. Among these units, almost half were classified as "other" meaning they were vacant and not on the market. Seasonal units comprised 30.8% of the vacant units.

Table 3: Chouteau County Housing Unit by Occupancy

Type of Housing Unit	Number	Percent
Occupied Housing Units	**2294**	**79.7**
Vacant (Total)	**585**	**20.3%**
Vacant – for Rent	*90*	*15.4%*
Vacant – for Sale	*40*	*6.8%*
Vacant - Seasonal	*180*	*30.8%*
Vacant – Migratory	*3*	*0.5%*
Vacant - Other	*272*	*46.5%*

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010 Census

4. Housing Unit by Type & Tenure

In 2010, traditional single-family units were the predominant type of housing in the County, comprising 82.1% of all housing units. Mobile homes made up 12.2% of housing stock while duplexes and multi-family units comprised only 5.7% of all units in the County. The majority of multi-family units were in Fort Benton. While single family units comprised almost 80% of the housing stock, only 63.4% of the housing stock are owner-occupied, indicating that some single-family and mobile home units are rental units. The homeownership rate declined from the 2000 Census when it was 69% and is lower than the current statewide rate of 67.7%

Table 4: Housing Unit by Type

Type of Unit	#	%
Single-Family	2367	82.1%
2-4 units in structure	74	2.5%
5+ units in structure	93	3.2%
Mobile Homes/Other	352	12.2%
Owner Occupied	--	63.4%
Renter Occupied	--	36.6%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2010 - 2014

5. Housing Age

The housing stock in Chouteau County is typically much older than that of Montana with almost half (49.4%) of the homes built prior to 1959. In comparison only 29.5% of Montana's existing housing stock that was built during this time period. In Chouteau County around 29% of housing units were constructed before 1939 compared to 14.6% statewide.

Table 5: Housing Units by Year Housing Built

Year Structure Built	Number	Percent
2010 or later	34	1.2%
2000-2009	116	4.0%
1990-1999	281	9.8%
1980-1989	314	10.9%
1970-1979	348	12.1%
1969-1960	347	12.0%
1950-1959	379	13.2%
1940-1959	230	8.0%
1939 or earlier	832	28.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2010 - 2014

A concern with older homes is deferred maintenance, lack of modern features, and energy inefficient features. The cost to upgrade homes that have not received routine maintenance can be a deterrent to rehabilitation. Financing for homes needed extensive repairs or not meeting FHA home inspections requirements can be difficult to obtain. Older homes are less likely to have energy efficient improvements such as modern heating/air condition systems, insulation and windows and doors that meet energy conservation standards. Higher heating and cooling costs contribute to overall housing costs.

Another concern with older homes is lead-based paint. Any home built, or more specifically, painted, before 1978 may have lead-based paint. Lead-based paint becomes hazardous when it chips off or turns to dust. It can cause permanent side-effects when inhaled or swallowed and is a risk, especially to young children.

As the population ages, older homes most likely will require retrofits to accommodate seniors with disabilities and allow them to age in place. Remodeling to make the home accessible for wheelchairs, upgrades to bathrooms to include safety features and other recommended improvements for seniors, can be costly.

Older mobile homes have additional issues. Mobile homes built before 1976 predate the HUD Code established in "National Manufactured Housing Construction and Safety Standards Act". Mobile homes built prior to the enactment of these standards were generally built of flimsy and non-durable materials, not really designed for long-term permanent housing. In addition, materials used were sometimes highly flammable and the homes lacked sufficient ventilation and insulation. Often building components contained toxic materials such as asbestos and formaldehyde. Mobile homes typically have higher energy costs.

6. Housing Condition

The Montana Department of Commerce – Housing Division, commissioned a "Housing Condition Study" to collect information in support of the Montana Consolidated Plan for housing. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the current stock of housing in Montana and better understand what type of housing structures are available to rent and purchase. The data was compiled from the database of building in Montana that is maintained by the Montana Department of Revenue (MDOR).

The appraiser gives single family homes a rating that describes the condition of the dwelling. The rating is based on the overall physical condition or state of repair, and the condition of such features as foundations, porches, walls, exterior trim, roofing, and other attributes. The rating system follows:

a. *Unsound* – Indicating that the dwelling is structurally unsound, not suitable for habitation, and subject to condemnation.

b. *Poor* – Indicating that the dwelling shows many signs of structural damage (sagging roof, foundation cracks, uneven floors, etc.) combined with a significant degree of deferred maintenance.

c. *Fair* – Indicating that the dwelling is in structurally sound condition, but has greater than normal deterioration relative to its age (significant degree of deferred maintenance).

d. *Average* – Indicating that the dwelling shows only minor signs of deterioration caused by normal "wear and tear".

e. *Good* – Indicating that the dwelling exhibits an above ordinary standard of maintenance and upkeep in relation to its age.

f. *Excellent* – Indicating that the dwelling exhibits an outstanding standard of maintenance and upkeep in relation to its age.

Approximately 14% of the single-family housing stock in Chouteau County is rated as unsound or in very poor condition. Another 37% of the single-family housing stock is rated as fair or poor. This is below the statewide average of housing units that are in poor or worse condition. Of the remaining units in the county, 27% are in average condition while 22% of the units are in good, very good or excellent condition.

Table 6: Chouteau County Single-Family Housing Condition - 2008

	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	Very Poor	Unsound	Total
#	3	40	533	704	662	324	183	194	2644
%	<1%	2%	20%	27%	25%	12%	7%	7%	100%

Source: Montana Department of Housing, "Montana Housing Condition Study", 2008

7. Housing Costs

According to the U.S. Census, the median value of homes in Chouteau County is significantly lower than the median cost of home for the state of Montana. In the region, the median cost of home is comparable to rural counties such as Pondera, Judith Basin and Fergus. More populated counties, such as Cascade and Hill counties, have higher median home values. Chouteau County has the lowest median rents in the region.

Table 7: Median Housing Value for Selected Counties

County	Median Value Owner- Occupied Units	Median Rent
Chouteau	$115,100	$435
Cascade	$159,900	$629
Pondera	$105,800	$564
Hill	$125,600	$533
Liberty	$88,200	$501
Teton	$135,600	$552
Fergus	$120,200	$664
Judith Basin	$117,000	$485
Montana	$187,600	$696

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010 – 2014

9. Housing Affordability

The Census defines a household having a cost burden when 30% of more of monthly household income is being spent on monthly housing costs. As indicated below, almost 11.3% of households with incomes less than $20,000 per year experience a cost burden in regards to housing compared to 13.5% statewide. Of households with incomes from $20,000 to $34,999, 4.5% are experiencing a cost burden compared to 8.0% statewide. Renters are likely to be experiencing a cost burden with 39.5% of renters experiencing a cost burden in Chouteau County.

Table 8: % Households with Housing Cost Burden by Income Level – Chouteau n County

<$20,000	$20,000 - $34,999	$35,000-$49,999	$50,000 - $74,000	$75,000+
11.3	4.5	1.7	1.6	0.2

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2010 - 2014

Table 9: % with Housing Cost Burden by Housing Tenure

	Chouteau County	Montana
Renters with Cost Burden	39.3%	46.6%
Homeowner with a mortgage	3.8%	32.6%
Homeowner without a mortgage	8.7%	12.4%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2010 - 2014

9. Group Quarters

The U.S. Census Bureau defines group quarters living facilities for persons not living in households. Typical types of group quarters include nursing care facilities, group homes, detention centers, and dormitories. Often these facilities provide housing for persons with special needs and are a critical component of the housing inventory. In Chouteau County, these special need groups include the disabled, seniors, homeless, and youth. The largest of these groups is the elderly population.

Table 10: Group Quarter Population in Chouteau County

1990	2000	2014
148	199	156

Source: U.S. Census Bureau – Census of the Population & American Community Survey 2010 - 2014

10. Housing Assistance

a. Section 8

Housing assistance is provided through rent subsidies. The Montana Department of Commerce - Housing Division administers programs for Fort Benton and Chouteau County through its District IV – Human Resource and Development Council Office in Havre. The primary rent subsidy program is the Section 8 program.

The Section 8 Housing program provides rental assistance to very low-income families. Section 8 Tenant Based Housing Assistance Programs (Certificates, Rental Vouchers and Moderate Rehabilitation), financed by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and administered by the Montana Housing Assistance Bureau, (406) 444-2804, allow very low income families to pay a set amount toward rent and utilities, based on their grow adjusted income (currently 30%). Very low-income families have incomes of 50% or less of the HUD median family income for the county in which the family resides, established by HUD annually. The programs provide subsidy payments to property owners on behalf of program participants.

In Fort Benton, Section 8 vouchers are used at the Sunrise Bluffs estates. Additionally, Canyon Villa Apartments received a HUD loan and must reserve some units for low-income households. To qualify for housing assistance, applicants must meet income requirements established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development based on census data. Table 12 indicates income requirements for Chouteau County.

Table 11: Chouteau County Income Limits – FY2016 (40% of Median Income)

	1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person
Low Income	$16,920	$19,320	$21,720	$24,120	$26,080	$28,000	$29,920	$31,840

Source: U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, http://www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/il/il10/mt.pdf

b. USDA Rural Development *(www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt/mso.htm)*

- 502 Direct Loans - Loans for low- and very low-income households to obtain 100% financing for purchase of an existing dwelling, purchase a site and construct a dwelling, or purchase newly constructed dwellings located in rural areas. Mortgage payments are based on the household's adjusted income.

- 504 Repair and Rehabilitation Loans - Loans are available to very low-income rural residents who own and occupy a dwelling in need of repairs to improve or modernize a home, or to remove health and safety hazards.

- Rural Housing Repair and Rehabilitation - A grant is available to owner/occupant who is 62 years of age or older. Funds may only be used for repairs or improvements to remove health and safety hazards, or to complete repairs to make the dwelling accessible for household members with disabilities.

- 523 Mutual Self-Help Housing Loan - Targets very low- and low-income households who are unable to buy clean, safe housing through conventional methods. Families participating in a mutual self-help project perform approximately 65 percent of the construction labor on each other's homes under qualified supervision.

- Guaranteed Rural Housing (GRH) Loan Program - Applicants for loans may have an income of up to 115% of the median income for the area. Families must be without adequate housing, but be able to afford the mortgage payments, including taxes and insurance. In addition, applicants must have reasonable credit histories.

- Multi-Family Housing—Rental Assistance Program (Section 521) - Provides a number of finance options to developers of low-income rental housing.

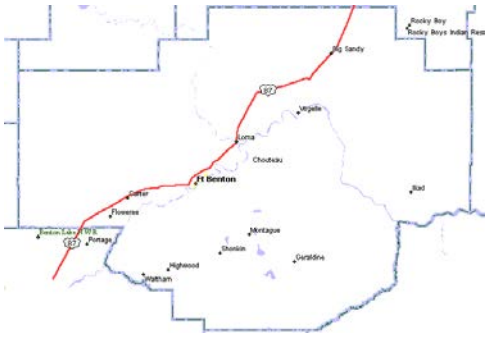
C. NeighborWorks Montana (http://www.nwmt.org/)

NeighborWorks Montana works with local service partners throughout the state to provide homebuyers education, one-to-one housing counseling, loans for down payment and closing costs, and due-on-sale loans for "gap financing.

D. Fair Housing

The Fair Housing Act and subsequent amendments prohibit discrimination in the sale, rental, and financing of housing based on the protected classes of race, religion, national origin, sex, disability, and family status. With the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as the lead administrator, the Fair Housing Act covers most housing accommodations and all transactions related to the selling, purchasing, or rental of housing.

In Montana, laws prohibiting housing discrimination are found in the Montana Human Rights Act (MCA 49-2-305) and provide additional protection for religion/creed, age, and marital status. The Human Rights Bureau (HRB) of the Montana Department of Labor & Industry (DLI) investigates and enforces complaints of housing discrimination covered under the Human Rights Act. There are no fair housing programs or organizations within Northcentral Montana—the nearest is Montana Fair Housing in Butte.



LAND USE

OVERVIEW

- Private Land comprises 82% of land area in the county while State trust land comprises 10.5% of land area and Federal public lands comprise 6%.
- More than half of the land area (54%) in the county is used for crops while rangeland represents 27% of the land use. Developed areas represent the smallest land area with less than 1%.
- Fort Benton, Geraldine, and Big Sandy are the incorporated cities and all have central commercial, institutional uses, and parks with surrounding single-family residential areas. Land development in the urban interface around these cities is not under municipal jurisdiction.
- Unincorporated developed areas include Loma, Carter, Highwood and Square Butte. In the unincorporated towns, the county is responsible for enforcing property maintenance issues such as abandoned vehicles, deteriorated homes, overgrown weeds, and debris.
- Housing development activity in the County has been occurred primarily near Highwood, Fort Benton, Carter and Brady.
- Most of the land under conservation easements are privately held.
- There are historic sites and structures throughout the County. Fort Benton is listed as a National Historic Landmark. There is an effort to establish the Upper Missouri National Heritage Area.
- Scenic resources are located along the Missouri and have been identified in the Bureau of Land Management resource inventory for the National Monument. Other scenic resources include unique land forms, mountain ranges, and waterways.
- Recreational areas include Bureau of Land Management sites along the Missouri River, municipal parks, fishing access sites, and trails in the Highwood Mountains.
- Steep slopes are found throughout the county and limit development potential. There are several wetlands areas identified as "at-risk".
- There are no hazardous clean-up sites in the County. There are underground storage sites where remediation is underway.
- There is a development permit system in place. The subdivision regulations were recently updated.

1. Geography

Chouteau County is located in the north-central part of the state, it borders Pondera, Liberty, Hill, Blaine, Fergus, Judith Basin, and cascade Counties. The County encompasses 3,936 square miles with an extreme width of 95 miles and an extreme length of 65 miles.

The County is the 10th largest in land area out of 56 counties in the State and ranks 33 in population. With a total estimated population of 5,767 in 2015, the County has an average of 1.5 persons per square mile compared to the State average of 6.8 persons per square mile.

In general, the terrain is primarily benchlands, valleys, coulees, and rugged mountains. The two primary mountain ranges are the Bear's Paw and the Highwoods ranges. The elevations of the County range from 7,680 feet above sea level in the Highwoods to less than 2,300 where the Missouri River leaves the county enroute to the Fort Peck Reservoir.

The Missouri River, dissects the County from east to west and is the major water feature in the County. The portion of the river from Fort Benton to US Highway 191 in northcentral Montana was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in 1976. In 2001, this stretch was declared a national monument. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees management of this stretch of river and adjoining public lands under the BLM jurisdiction. Other public lands include a portion of the Lewis and Clark National Forest in the Highwood Mountains and scattered parcels of BLM and State Trust lands.

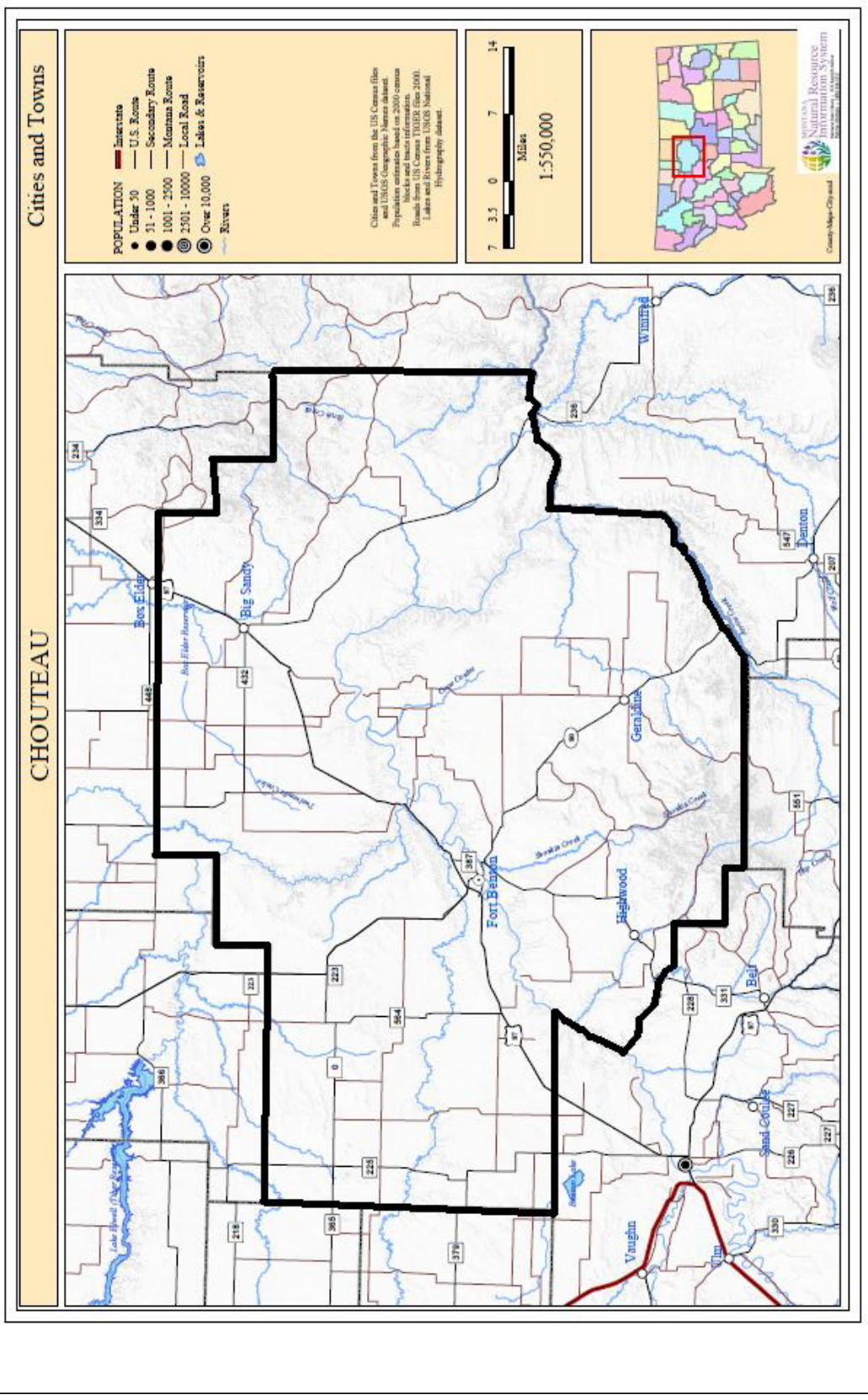
The major transportation route in the County is U.S. Highway 87 that runs by the County seat of Fort Benton. The Highway spans the County from Great Falls to the southwest of Fort Benton to Havre, northeast of Fort Benton. There are a number of secondary Montana Highways through the County. The nearest Interstate is I-15, west of the County. Great Falls is the nearest metropolitan area located 36 miles southwest of Fort Benton.

Table 1: Distances to Major Cities from Fort Benton

Town	Distance in Miles
Havre	75
Great Falls	40
Helena	130
Billings	223
Missoula	204

Source: www.randmcnally.com

Figure 1: Cities and Town in Chouteau County



2. Land Ownership

The County is comprised of 82% privately owned land with 6% of land under various Federal agencies and 10% of state owned land. Most of the Federal owned land is under the jurisdiction of Bureau of Land Management (see Natural Resources Chapter). In the south part of the County there is some land in the Lewis and Clark National Forest boundaries. (see Natural Resource Chapter).

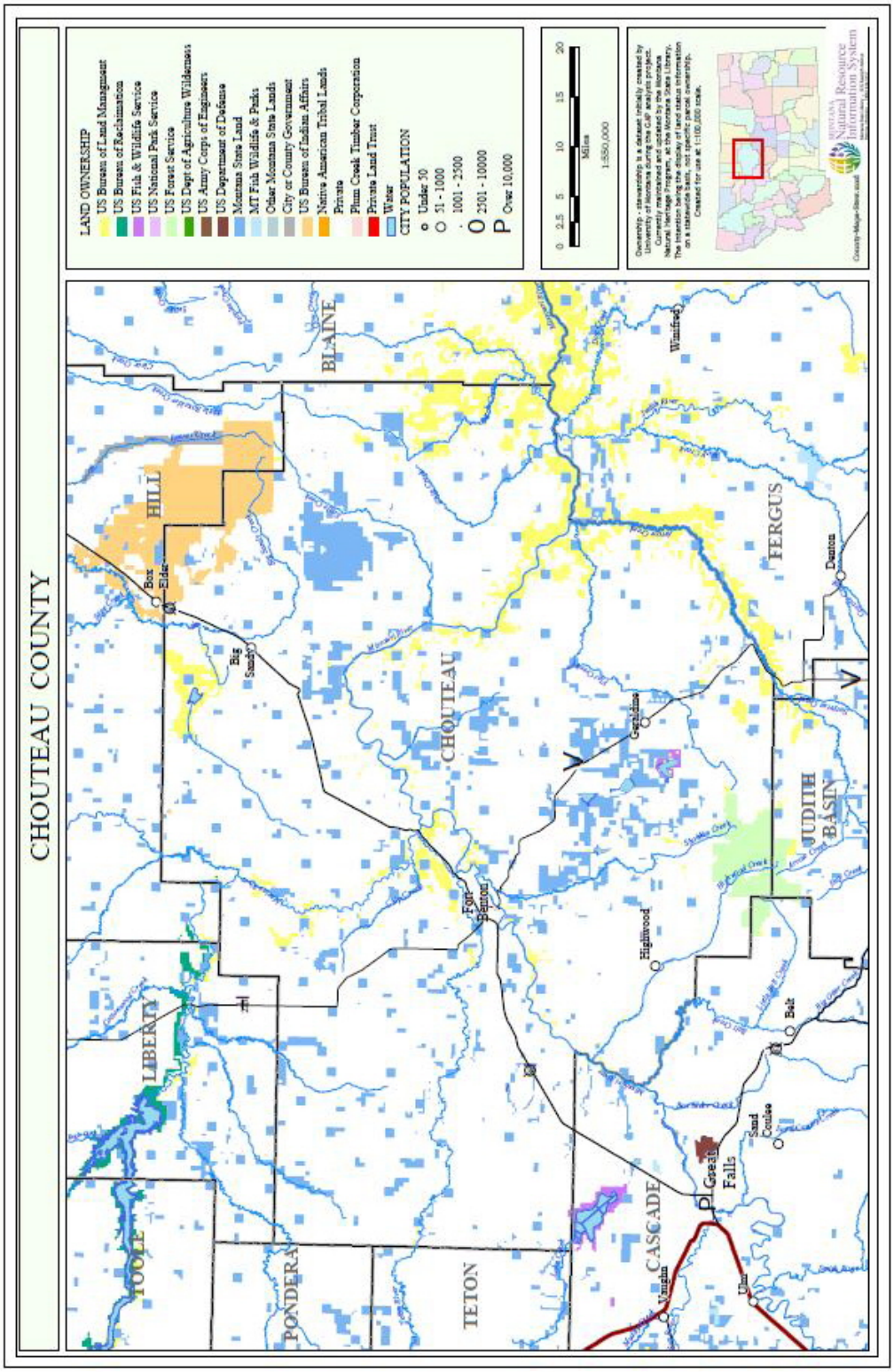
The State of Montana Land is comprised of State Trust Lands. The trust lands are scattered throughout the County. The income derived from state trust land including rentals is available for the maintenance and support of schools and institutions. The Trust Land Management Division administers land for the other state agencies, in addition to state trust land. The division is divided into four bureaus that represent the different types of land uses: Agriculture and Grazing Management, Forest Management, Minerals Management, and Special Use Management. In Chouteau County, trust land is primarily used for agriculture and grazing.

Table 2: Land Ownership in Chouteau County

Owner	**Acres**	**Sq. Miles**	**% of Total**
Private	2,081,007	3,251.57	81.63%
State Trust Land	266,956	417.12	10.47%
Bureau of Land Management	125,964	196.82	4.94%
Tribal Land	33,609	52.51	1.32%
U.S. Forest Service	30,690	47.95	1.20%
Water	8,643	13.50	0.34%
US Fish and Wildlife Service	2,244	3.51	0.09%
Other Federal	150	0.23	0.01%
Other State Land	225	0.04	0.00%
TOTAL	**2,549,299**	**3,983.26**	

Source: Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) Geographic Information System (GIS)

Figure 2: Land Ownership in Chouteau County



3. Land Use Patterns

Agriculture and rangeland comprise 81% of the county's land area. Forest comprises just over 1% of the land area with evergreen forest being the most predominant of forest types. The remaining land is divided among a variety of uses, each comprising less than one percent of the area. These include, water (lakes), streams, exposed rock, wetland, commercial, residential, urban, transportation, and quarries. Urban areas comprise the smallest percentage of land area in the County.

Table 3: Land Use and Acreage in Chouteau County

Owner	Acres	Percent
Agriculture - Crop, Pasture, Other	1,401,406	54%
Rangeland	708,190	27%
Evergreen, Deciduous, Mixed Forest	36,019	1.4%

Source: Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) Geographic Information System (GIS)

Data derived from USGS GIRAS files, some provided by the U.S. Bureau of Mines, others downloaded from the USGS World Wide Web server. GIRAS is the U.S. Geological Survey's Geographic Information Retrieval and Analysis System. The U.S.G.S. digitized the data from 1:250,000 scale maps, which it created through field surveys and aerial photo interpretation. The minimum size of regions to be classified was 10 acres in urban areas, 40 acres in rural areas, linear manmade features at least 660 feet wide, and linear natural features at least 1320 feet wide.

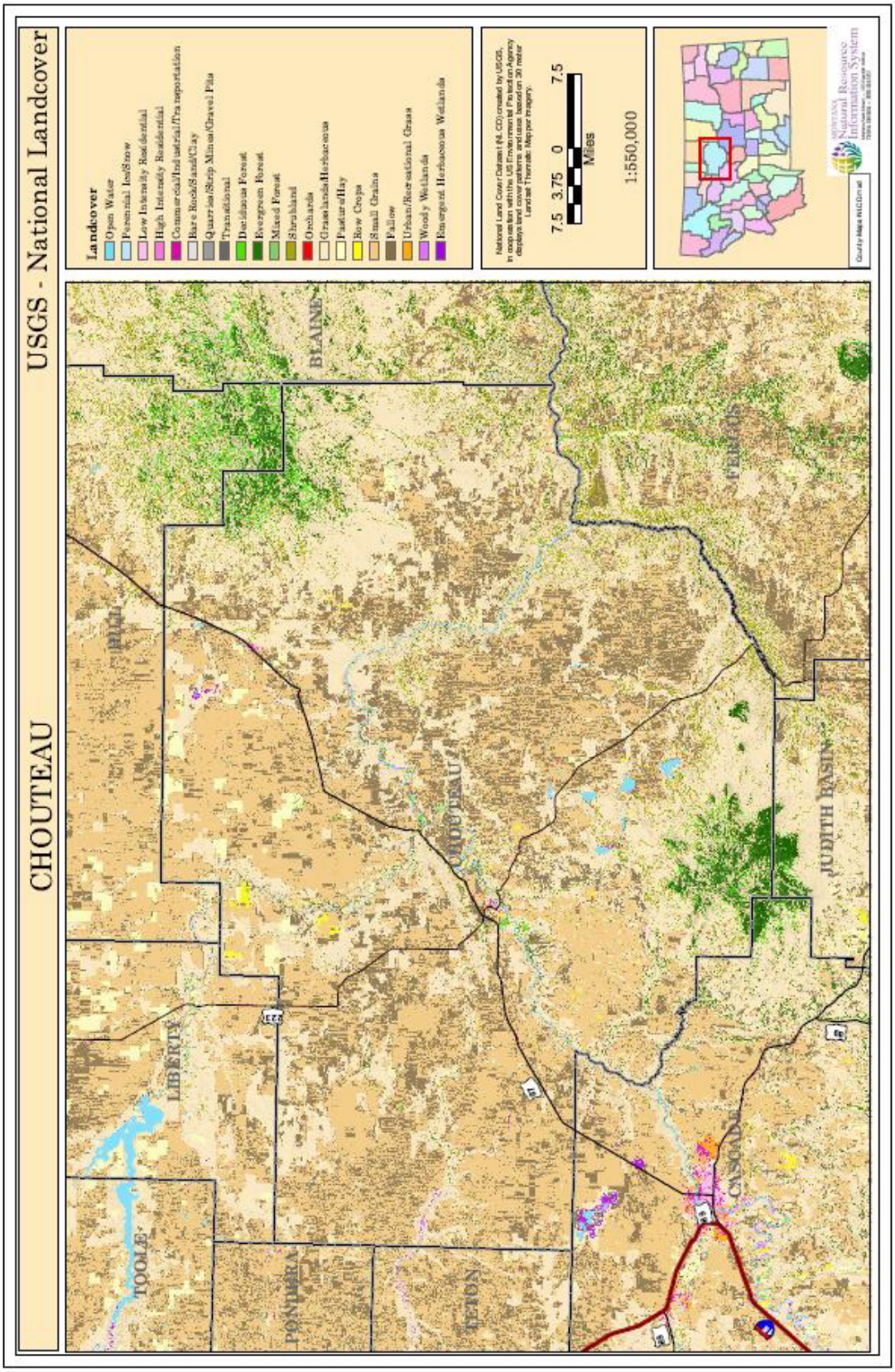
Of agricultural uses, cropland is the primary use comprising 56% of agricultural land area. Grazing comprises about 42% of agricultural land use.

Table 4: Agricultural Land Use and Acreage in Chouteau County

Owner	Acres	Percent
Fallow Crop	1,185,095	56.2%
Grazing	895,430	42.5%
Timber	11,292	0.5
Wild Hay	6,478	0.3
Irrigated	5,143	0.2
Other	3,846	0.2

Source: Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) Geographic Information System (GIS)
** Based on estimates based on parcel database. Numbers may vary from other sources such as acreage reported by ag producers to the Farm Service agency.*

Figure 3: Land Use in Chouteau County



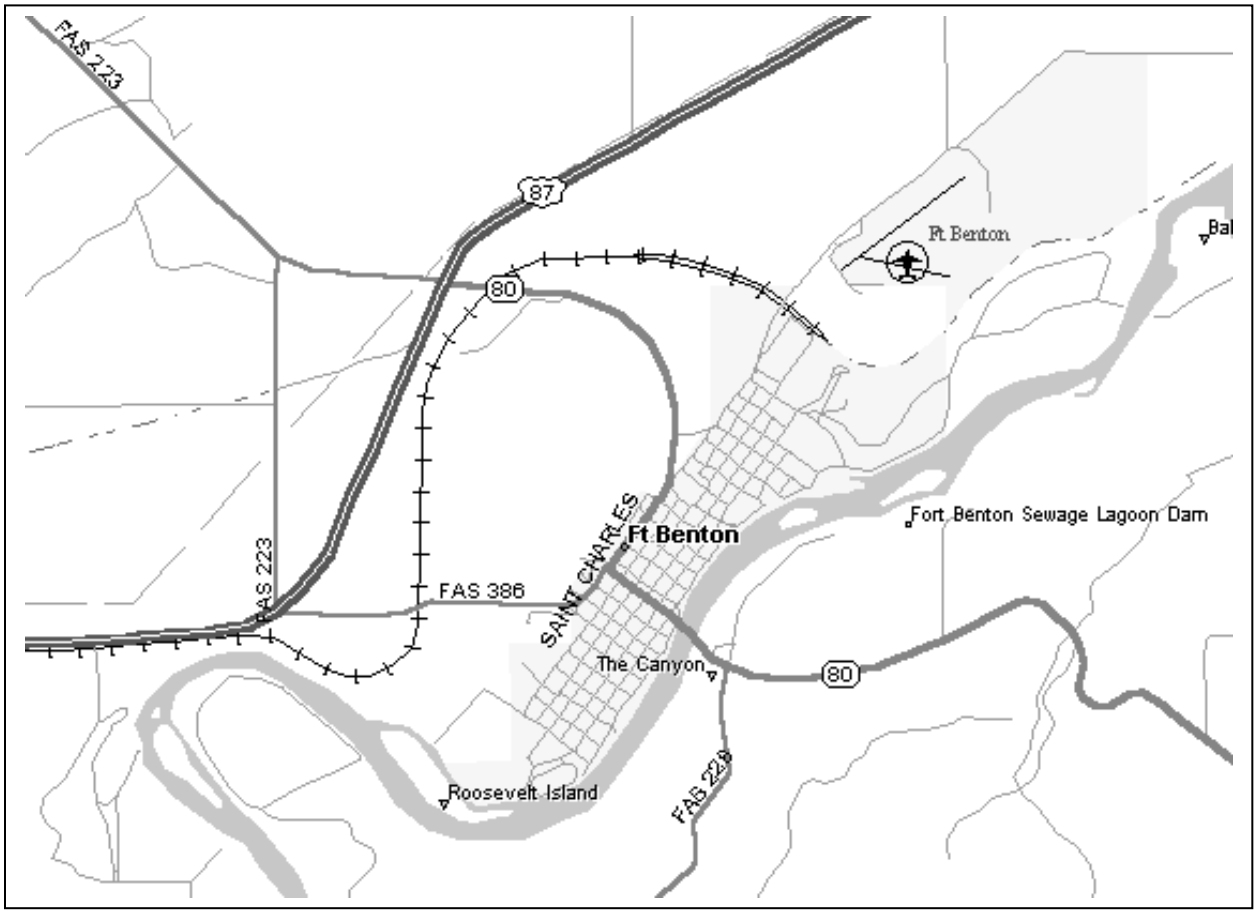
4. Developed Areas

The incorporated areas of Fort Benton, Big Sandy, and Geraldine account for most of the developed land in the County. Additional unincorporated areas include the Loma, Carter, Square Butte and Highwood.

1. Fort Benton

Fort Benton is located on U.S. Highway 87 about the center of the County. Development has occurred along the river bank and northwest toward the bluffs. The central portion of the town (original townsite) is where the business district is located. Residential areas developed around the commercial area. Auto oriented commercial is located closer to U.S. Highway 87 with an industrial area along the railroad tracks north of town. Since 2010, new industrial uses include a new pea plan and a new fertilizer plant. Fort Benton is the oldest inhabited town in the state. The city comprises 2.1 square miles of land area. The City recently revised its growth policy plan and there is a city zoning ordinance.

Figure 4: Fort Benton



2. Big Sandy

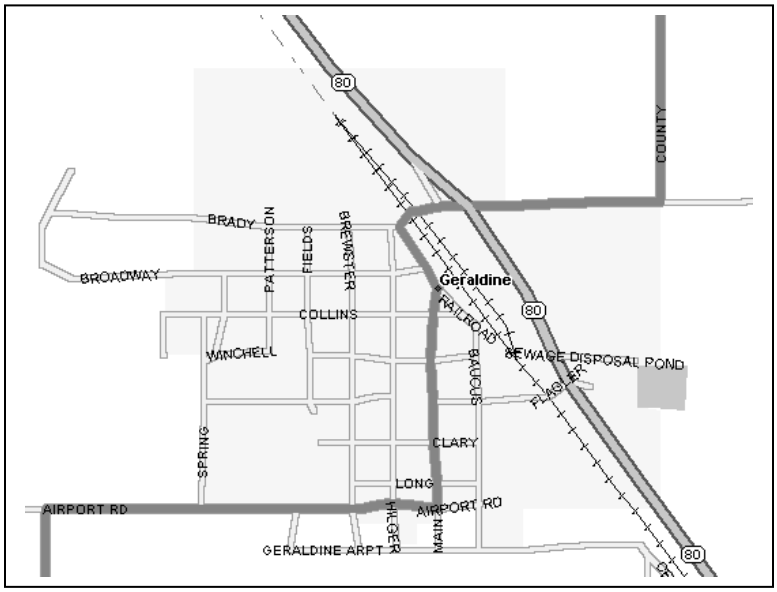
Big Sandy is located on both sides of the Burlington Northern Railway and U.S. Highway 87. It is located in the north part of the County and comprises 0.4 square miles of land area. The business district is located on the southeast side of the highway. The residential areas are located on three sides of the commercial area. Big Sandy adopted a Growth Policy in 2008.

Figure 5: Big Sandy

3. Geraldine

The town of Geraldine is located along highway 80. Development is confined to the southwest side of the highway. The central business district is located on the original townsite and is confined to one area. The residential area extends southwest of the commercial site. There is a community park and a historic train depot in town.

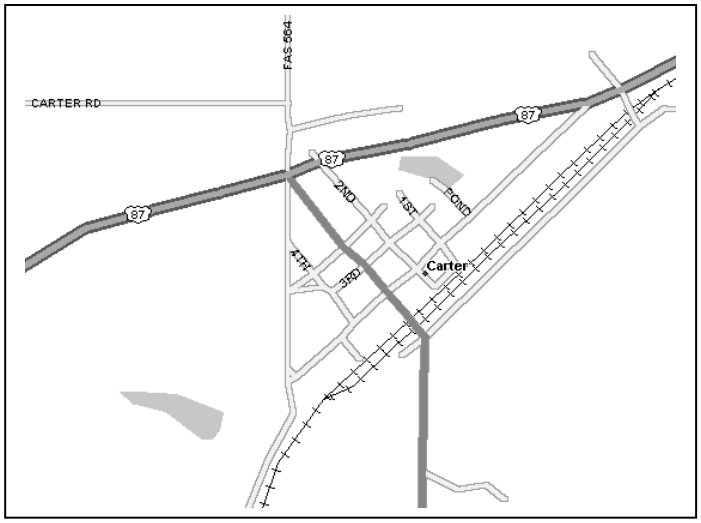
Figure 6: Geraldine



4. Carter

Carter is an unincorporated area located on Highway 87 approximately 14 miles southwest of Fort Benton. The railroad and grain elevators are the dominant feature. There is a community center and post office near the railroad and an elementary school closer to Hwy 87. There is no commercial area except for a restaurant on Hwy 87. The remaining land area is residential with gravel streets. The residential area is characterized by older homes, many reflecting deferred maintenance. There are a significant number of vacant houses. Abandoned automobiles in the residential areas is common.

Figure 7: Carter



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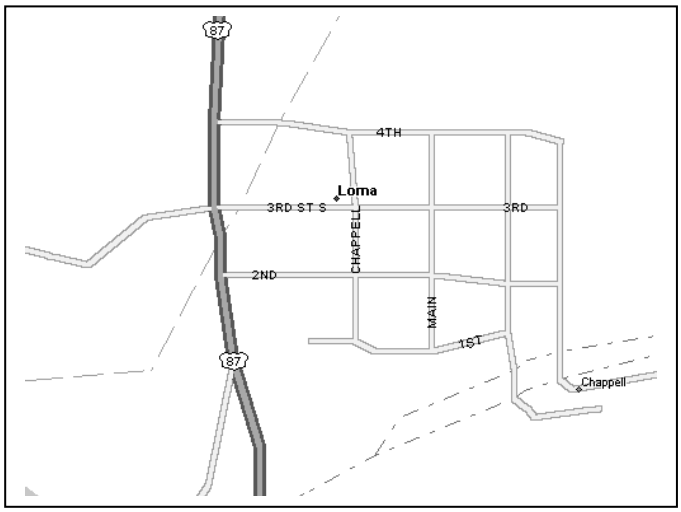
5. Loma

Loma is an unincorporated area 11 miles northwest of Fort Benton on Highway 87. The community is surrounded by buttes. The post office is located in the center of town. The elementary school and a small museum are on the east side of town. The only community uses are a mini-mart on Highway 87. An enclosure for livestock borders the south side of town, directly opposite single-family homes. The remaining land area is residential with gravel streets. The residential area is characterized by older homes, many reflecting deferred maintenance. There are a significant number of vacant and boarded-up houses. Abandoned automobiles in the residential areas is common. The Marias River is south of town and there is fishing access at the bridge. The restaurant and convenience store were recently updated.

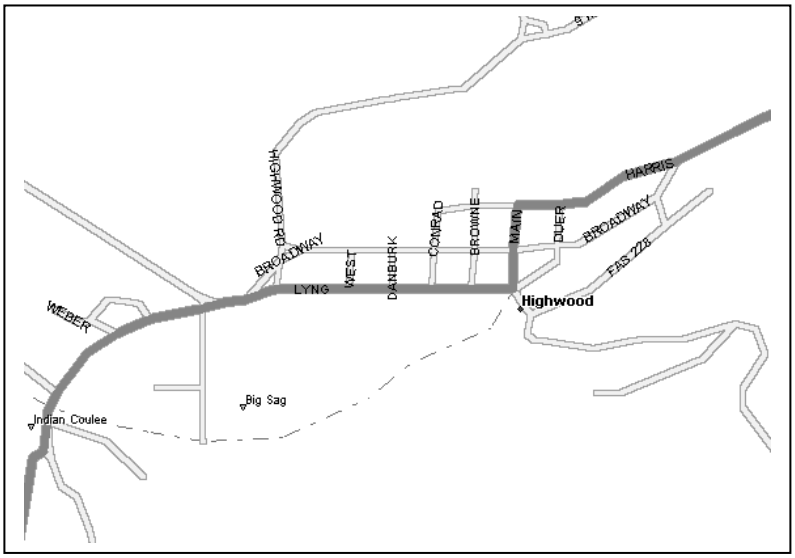
Figure 8: Loma



6. Highwood

Highwood is an unincorporated community located in the southern part of the County on MT Highway 228. The surrounding area is characterized by hilly terrain. Institutional uses include a post office, school, community center and post office. There are a few commercial uses along Main Street. The remaining land area is residential with gravel streets. The residential area is characterized by generally well maintained older homes. Property maintenance issues include abandoned cars and tarpaper shacks. Citizens are endorsing a county decay ordinance. Four new homes have been built since 2014.

Figure 9: Highwood



7. Square Butte

Square Butte is located on MT Highway 80 about seven miles south of Geraldine. The town derives its name from the nearby landform that is managed by the Bureau of Land Management. There is a restaurant near the highway. A closed elementary school is in the town and a historic jail. The remainder of the town is residential with gravel streets. The homes are generally in poor condition with many vacant/abandoned structures in that are extremely deteriorated. Most of the homes have abandoned vehicles, junk, overgrown weeds, or open trash in the yards.

Figure 10: Square Butte

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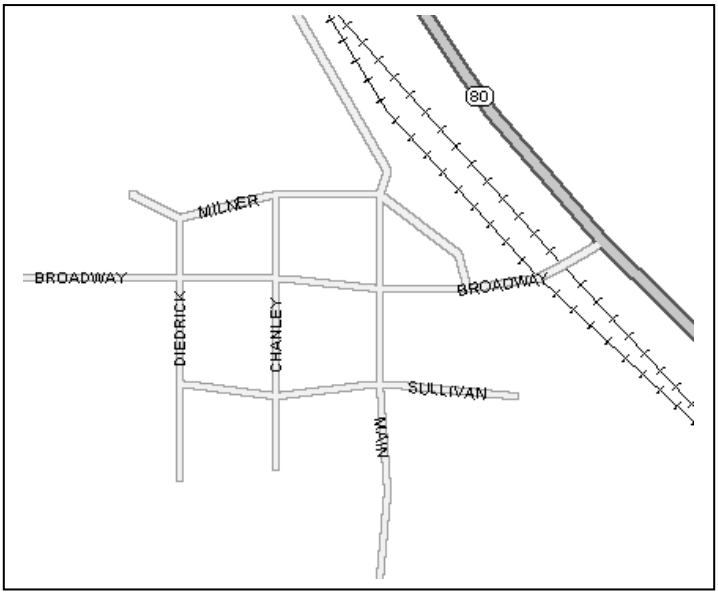


Examples of Various Land Uses from Unincorporated Towns in Chouteau County:

Figure 11: Commercial Use in Highwood

Figure 12: Nuisance Violation

Figure13: Deteriorated Residence & Abandoned Cars

Figure 14: Boarded up House & Overgrown Vegetation

Figure 15: Grain Elevators in Carter

Figure 16: Buffalo in Livestock Yard in Loma

5. Development Activity

1. Subdivision

There are three types of plats that may be filed with the County Clerk and Recorder that creates new lots.

Subdivisions — The division of land that creates one or more parcels for the purpose of selling, renting, leasing or conveying the land. Subdivisions that create parcels containing less than 160 acres are subject to the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act and local regulations. The Chouteau subdivision ordinance was updated in 2016.

Certificate of Surveys — Land divisions that are exempt from local government review and approval as subdivisions, but which must be surveyed and a certificate of survey filed (without local subdivision approval) before title can be transferred. This includes any parcel 160 acres or larger in size or parcels less than 160 acres but exempt under provisions for a family transfer, agricultural purpose or relocation of a common boundary line.

Minor Subdivisions — Subdivisions that have five or fewer lots, have proper access to all lots, and have no land that would be dedicated to the public for parks. The submission requirements and review procedures are streamlined for minor subdivisions.

Major Subdivisions — All subdivisions that are not exempt under certificate of surveys or that do not meet the criteria for minor subdivisions.

Typically, there has been little subdivision activity in the County. Since 2000, the Department of Environmental Quality has approved 26 lots in preliminary plats.

Table 4: Development Activity from 2000 - 2015

Year	# of C.O.S	Subdivision Applications	Lots Created in Subdivisions
2000	11	1	1
2001	18	2	3
2002	9	1	7
2003	8	0	0
2004		0	0
2005		0	0
2006		2	2
2007		2	6
2008		2	4
2009		1	13
2010	5	4	
2011	4	4	
2012	2	3	
2013	4	4	
2014	5	6	
2015	9	6	

Source: County Clerk & Recorder & Montana Department of Environmental Quality

2. Septic Systems

Under the Montana Sanitation in Subdivision Act, parcels less than 20 acres in size resulting from the division of land must be reviewed for compliance with septic and wastewater disposal. The review is conducted by the Department of Environmental Quality and the local health official. Land may be subdivided into new lots and remain vacant for an indeterminate amount of time before there is any change in land use. When these lots develop, requiring a permit for a new septic system would allow the county to track new development. Currently, the County contracts with an environmental consultant to review septic systems for those lots that are subject to the Development Permit regulations. There is not comprehensive system for monitoring replacement systems and systems on lots that do not require a development permit. Many counties do require this.

3. Conservation Easements

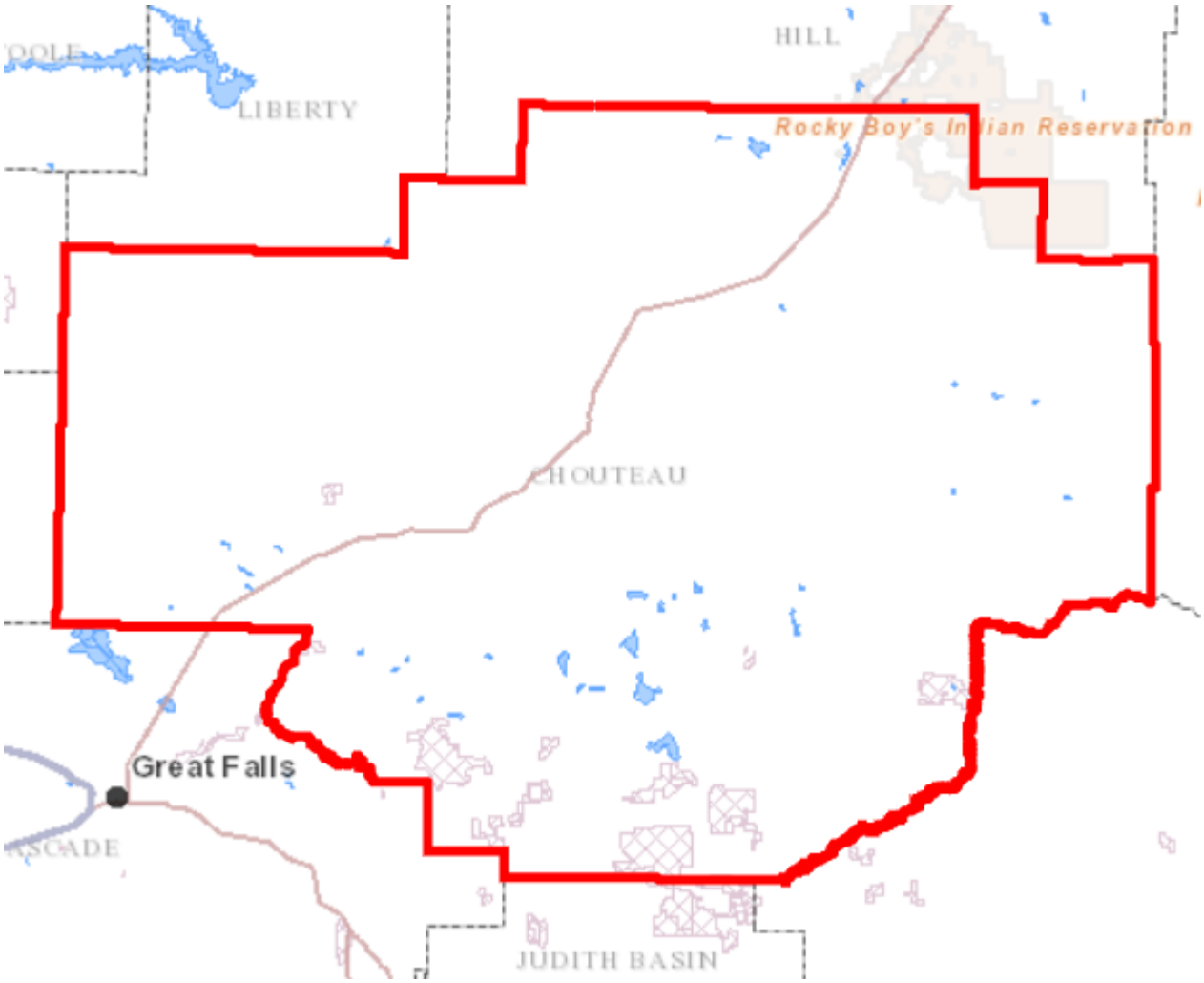
Conservation easements are a way to preserve land from certain types of future development. A conservation easement allows a landowner to maintain ownership and current use of the land while preventing subdivisions and preserving an economically viable agricultural operation and wildlife habitat. Conservation easements are voluntary with property owners establishing the easement through recording a legal document with the County Clerk that is perpetual and runs with the land. Often there are tax benefits through the easements. A number of organizations work with landowners to establish or purchase easements for land that has significant habitat, scenic, or other natural value. In Chouteau County, there are 47,394 acres of land covered under conservation easements. Approximately 11,000 acres of new conservation easements have been created since 2010. Most of these easements are in the southern portion of the county near the Lewis and Clark National Forest.

Table 6: Acres of Conservation Easements in Chouteau County

Conservation Easement	**Acres**
Montana Land Reliance	32,182
Fish and Wildlife Service	14,948
Other	264
TOTAL	**47,394**

Source: Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) - 2016

Figure 17 : Conservation Easements in Chouteau County



Source: Montana Natural Resource Information System (NRIS)

6. Historic Sites

1. National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under NHPA, the Register is administered by the National Park Service. Properties on the National Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture.

Since listing on the register is voluntary, there may be properties that are historically significant or identified in some other survey that are not listed on the National Register. Table 7 only represents properties actually on the National Register.

Table 7: Chouteau Properties Listed on the National Register

Resource Name	Address	Date Listed
Baker, I. G., House	1604 Front St.	1980
Chouteau County Courthouse	1308 Franklin St.	1980
Citadel Rock	E. of Fort Benton	1974
Fort Benton Bridge	Spans the Missouri River	1980
Fort Benton Engine House	Front and 15th St.	1980
Grand Union Hotel	14th & Front St.	1976
Masonic Building	1418 Front St.	1980
St. Paul's Episcopal Church	14th and Chouteau St.	1980
Geraldine Milwaukee Depot	Railroad Ave.	1997
Square Butte Jail	Salsbury Ave.	1998
Teton River Crossing on the Whoop-Up Trial	Teton River	1993
Virgell Mercantile & State Bank	Co. Road 430 – 6.3 miles south of US 87	1997
Eagle Butte School	23 mile off of MT 80	2009
1rst National Bank of Geraldine	311 Main St.	2008
Judith Landing Historic District		1975
Mason Building	1918 Front St.	1980
Lewis & Clark Camp at Slaughter River		1974
Lone Tree	S. of Geraldine	1980
West Quincy Giant Quarry	Flat Creek Rd. Near Square Butte	2000
Square Butte School	Square Butte	2013
Shonkin Creek Bridge	21 miles from Geraldine	2012

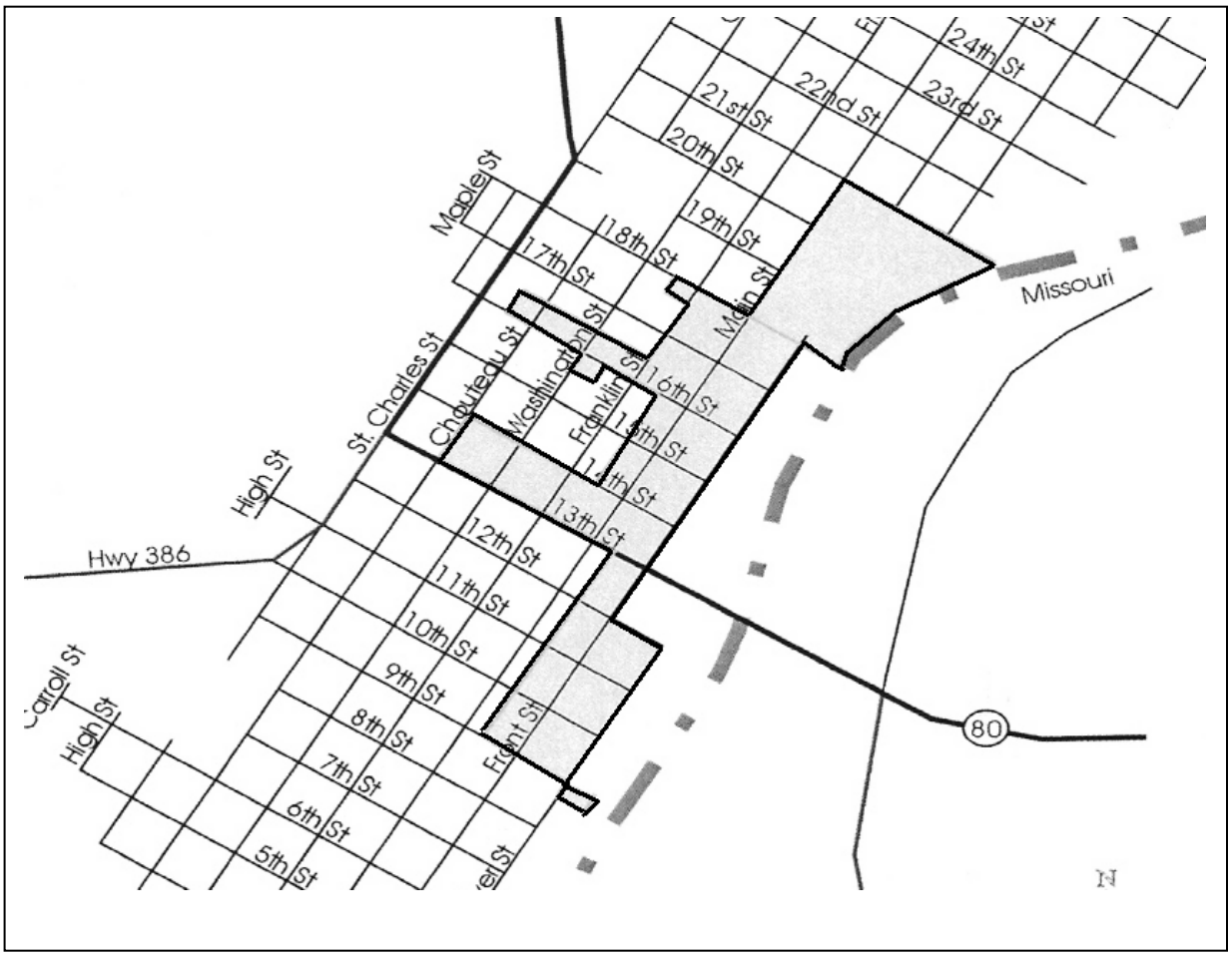
Source: National Park Service, National Register Index Service

2. National Historic Landmarks

In 1935, the U.S. Congress charged the Department of the Interior with the responsibility for designating nationally significant historic sites, buildings, and objects, and promoting their preservation. The National Historic Landmarks Program was established to identify and protect places possessing exceptional value in illustrating the nation's heritage. Only 3% of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places are designated as National Historic Landmarks.

The City of Fort Benton is a National Historic Landmark. In 1982, the Historic District was enlarged from its original 1972 boundaries (See map). While the District is listed on the National Register, individual structures within the District must go through a separate process to be separately listed on the Register. There are a number of historically significant buildings that have been identified in surveys for the Landmark District that are not on the National Register.

Figure 18: Fort Benton National Landmark District



Source: Fort Benton Growth Policy

3. Historic American Buildings Survey

For over sixty years the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the oldest federal preservation program, has played a leading role in preservation through documentation. In 1933, the National Park Service and the Department of the Interior established HABS as a make-work program for architects, draftsmen and photographers left jobless by the Great Depression. Its mission then, as today, was to create a lasting archive of America's historic architecture. In so doing, HABS provided a database of primary source material for the then fledgling historic preservation movement. Properties in Fort Benton that are part of the HABS database include:

- Great Northern Railroad Bed, From Big Sandy to Verona, Completed 1887; Abandoned 1972
- Fort Benton Bridge, Spanning the Missouri River, Completed 1888; Altered 1908. Vehicular Bridge (initial use) Currently used as pedestrian bridge.
- Fort Benton Water Treatment Plan

4. Other Places

In addition to the individual buildings on the National Register, there are a number of trails and other places in the County with historic significance.

- Walking trail along the levee in Fort Benton with interpretive signs.
- The Old Fort Park and Museum of the Upper Missouri include reconstructed buildings of the Fort.
- Whoop-Up Trail. This trail served western Canadian provinces until the arrival of the railroad.
- Mullan Trail. Ran from Fort Benton to Walla Walla, Washington.
- Cow Island Trail. Overland freight route low water landing at Cow Island to Fort Benton.
- Fort Chardon. Fort used only a few months before burned. Hwy 236, No remains.
- Camp Cook. Hwy 236. First military post in state. Stone foundations remain.
- Fort Clagett. Hwy 236. Small fort for steamboat trade. No remains.
- Blackfoot Indian Treaty Site. Hwy 236. Govenor Stevens signed treat with 8 tribes in 1855. No remains. Grove of Cottonwood trees.
- Fort Mackenzie. U.S. 87. Early trading post. Burned in 1844. Stones of foundation remain.
- Fort Campbell. U.S. 87. Early rival fur post 1 mile from Fort Benton from 1847 to 1850. No remains.
- Fort Lewis. U.S. 87. Up river 3 miles from Fort Benton. On wrong side of river so torn down. Site still visible.
- Fort Piegan. U.S. 87. Established for 1 year in 1832. Actual site unknown.
- Lewis & Clark Camp Site. Junction Marias & Missouri Rivers.
- Ophir Massacre. U.S. 87. Down river from Loma.
- Little Sandy Creek. Hwy. 236. Indian camp and burial sites. Teepee rings and arrow points in area.
- Proposed Upper Missouri River National Heritage Area

7. Scenic Resources

1. Upper Missouri National River Breaks National Monument

The resource management plan includes an inventory to evaluate the visual characteristics of land, water surface, vegetation, and structures which provided the subsequent delineation of scenic quality, sensitivity to changes in the visual landscape, and distance zones. The four categories include:

- VRM Class I - Includes the "Wild" segments of the River and is intended to preserve the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be very low and must not attract attention to the casual observer. There is a small wild of river at mile 52 south of the Chouteau County line.

- VRM Class II - Includes segments of the river classified as "Scenic" and "Recreational". In Chouteau County this includes the lower portion of the Arrow Creek watershed, and the Antelope Creek Wildlife Study Area. The VRM Class II rating is intended to retain the existing character of the landscape. Management activities may be seen but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Any changes must repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the landscape.

- VRM Class III - The VRM Class III areas are found in the uplands portion of the Monument. This rating is intended to partially retain the existing character of the landscape. Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. These changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the area.

- VRM Class IV - The VRM Class IV areas are also found in the uplands of the Monument. This rating is intended to provide for management activities, which could result in major modifications to the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the landscape can be high. These management activities may dominate the viewshed and be the major focus of the viewer's attention; however, every attempt should be made to minimize the impact of these activities through careful location, minimal disturbance, and repeating the basic elements (form, line, color, and texture).

2. Other Scenic Resources

Other areas in the County identified as scenic by various sources include:

- Citadel Rock
- Hole in the Wall
- Dark Butte
- Square Butte
- Buffalo Jump south of Carter
- Highwood Mountains
- Bears Paw Mountains
- Arrow Creek
- Shonkin Creek
- Highwood Creek
- Scenic Overlook - Hwy 87, Fort Benton
- Scenic Overlook - Hwy 80, Big Sag Land Formation

8. Recreational Areas

1. Upper Missouri

The 52 mile river segment between Fort Benton and Ebersol Bottom is classified as recreational. The following public sites and facilities support recreation activities taking placing in the river corridor. The sites are listed geographically in downstream order, beginning at Fort Benton.

- *Fort Benton Visitor Center* is a developed public access site staffed with volunteers and operated seven days a week from May 1 through September 15.
- *Evans Bend* is a primitive boat camp with a metal fire ring.
- *Senieurs Reach* is a primitive boat camp with a metal fire ring.
- *Black Bluff Rapids* is a primitive boat camp with a metal fire ring.
- *Wood Bottom* is a developed public access site with gravel parking area, a vault toilet, and an informal boat ramp. The access road to Wood Bottom is scheduled for reconstruction in September/October 2003.
- *Decision Point Interpretive Trail* is a developed public access site with gravel parking area, interpretive kiosk, and interpretive signs on a short hiking trail.
- *Coal Banks Landing* is a developed public access site and campground with tent and RV camping, 13 picnic tables, nine fire rings, two vault toilets, two parking areas, a concrete boat ramp, potable water, and a volunteer host contact station. Coal Banks is the primary launch point for visitors boating the Upper Missouri River. Reconstruction of the site is planned but not currently scheduled.
- *Little Sandy* is a developed boat camp with a vault toilet and two metal fire rings. An administrative road provides access to the site for the purpose of facility maintenance.
- *Eagle Creek* is a developed boat camp with two vault toilets and five metal fire rings. Eagle Creek, located on private land, is part of a Recreation Easement purchased by the BLM. An administrative road provides access for the purpose of facility maintenance.
- *Hole in the Wall* is a developed boat camp within a fenced enclosure with two vault toilets, five metal fire rings, and two shade shelters constructed of wood. The site has a non-potable well with a hand pump used to irrigate cottonwood and green ash plantings.
- *Dark Butte* is primitive boat camp within a fenced enclosure and has two metal fire rings and two composting toilets.
- *Pablo Rapids* is a primitive boat camp within an electric fence enclosure. The site has one metal fire ring and a solar panel that supplies power to the fence and power to irrigate cottonwood and green ash plantings.
- *Slaughter River* is a developed boat camp within a fenced enclosure. The site has two vault toilets, one shade shelter constructed of wood, and five fire rings.
- *The Wall* is a primitive boat camp within an electric fence enclosure. The site has one metal fire ring and a solar panel that provides power to the fence and power to irrigate cottonwood and green ash plantings.
- *Judith Landing* is a developed public access site and campground with a concrete boat ramp, two vault toilets, a volunteer host contact station, 11 picnic tables, and nine fire rings.

2. Municipal Facilities

All of the municipalities operate recreational facilities in the County. These include:

Table 8: Municipal Recreational Facilities

Facility	**Description**
Old Fort Park, Fort Benton.	Old Fort Buildings, swimming pool, tennis courts, picnic shelters, playground, Overnight RV parking
Steamboat Levee and Walking Bridge, Fort Benton	Interpretive signs, visitor center, Old Shep Statue, Canoe Launch
Sunset Park, Fort Benton	Playground, soccer fields, baseball fields, restrooms
Geraldine Community Park	Restrooms, playground, campground, pavilion
Big Sandy Park	Restrooms, Overnight RV parking, picnic facilities, playground
Big Sandy Swimming Pool	Swimming pool, picnic tables, playground
Signal Point Golf Course - Fort Benton	9-hole course, driving range, club house

Source: Fort Benton Growth Policy Plan, Chouteau County Comprehensive Plan, Field Observation

c. Fishing Access & Trails

- Loma Fishing Access
- Carters Ferry Fishing Access
- Lewis & Clark Forest, Highwood Division - Hiking Trails

9. Sensitive Lands

1. Slopes

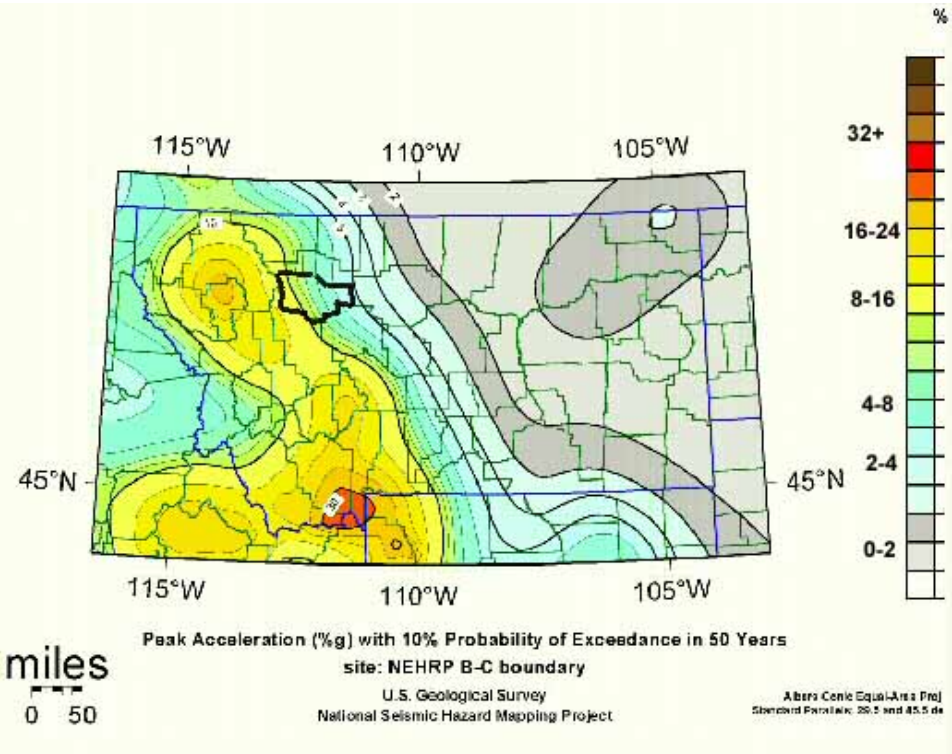
Slopes up to 8% are generally most suited for development. Slopes between 25-35% have extensive engineering limitations while slopes over 35% are generally not suitable for development. Steep slopes cause soil erosion, are subject to falling rocks and slope instability. The landscape in Chouteau County is characterized by rolling hills, bluffs, buttes, coulees, and ravines that can create steep slopes in areas. Additionally, there may be sharp elevation changes near the Highwood and Bear's Paw Mountains.

2. Earthquake Hazards

Engineers use national maps of the earthquake shaking hazard in the United States to create the seismic-risk maps and seismic design provisions contained in building codes. Local government agencies use building codes, such as the Uniform Building Code, to help establish the construction requirements necessary to preserve public health and safety in earthquakes.

The 1996 U.S. Geological Survey shaking-hazard maps for the United States are based on current information about the rate at which earthquakes occur in different areas and how far strong shaking extends from quake sources. Colors on the particular map show the levels of horizontal shaking that have a 1-in-10 chance of being exceeded in a 50-year period. Figure 19 indicates the severity of earthquakes is generally rated in the low to mid range for the County.

Figure 19: Earthquake Hazard Map For Montana



3. Flood Hazards

For purposes of floodplain management, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has adopted the 100-year flood as the base flood standard. The 500-year flood indicates additional areas of flood risk in the community. The 100-year flood is divided into floodway and a floodway fringe. The floodway is the channel of a stream plus any adjacent flood plain areas that must be kept free of encroachment. The floodway fringe encompasses the area of the floodplain that could be obstructed without substantial increase to the water surface elevation.

Fort Benton participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA has determined that the community is in compliance with regulations for NFIP and that there are no special flood hazard areas currently in existence in the community. FEMA has maps of the floodplains and floodways in communities. Areas that are outside these areas are mapped as Zone C and are not subject to any special floodplain restrictions. The entire community of Fort Benton is classified as Zone C. Occasional ice jams can cause some storm sewer back-ups and result in flooding.

3. Petroleum Release Fund Sites

The Board and the Petroleum Tank Release Cleanup Fund (Fund) was established by the 1989 Montana Legislature to provide adequate financial resources and effective procedures through which tank owners and operators may undertake, and be reimbursed for, cleanup of petroleum contamination and payment to third parties for damages caused by releases from petroleum storage tanks; to assist tank owners and operators in meeting financial assurance requirements under state and federal law governing operation of petroleum storage tanks; to assist in protecting public health and safety and the environment by providing cleanup of petroleum tank releases; and to provide tank owners with incentives to improve petroleum storage tank facilities in order to minimize the likelihood of accidental releases. There are 26 sites in the county that have received funds.

Table 9: Petroleum Release Fund Sites

Facility Name	Number of Sites
Fort Benton	10
Big Sandy	7
Geraldine	3
Carter	2
Highwood	2
Loma	1

Source: http://svc.mt.gov/deq/dst/#/app/ptrcb/results/0/0/county/CHOUTEAU/0/0

5) Hazardous Waste

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regulates facilities that deal with hazardous substances. Among the programs that monitor these sites are Toxic Release Inventory, Resource Conservation Recovery Act (RCRA),and the CERCLA -Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, which monitors the Superfund Sites. There are no CERCLA sites in the planning area.

RCRA requires that generators, transporters, treaters, storers, and disposers of hazardous waste provide information concerning their activities to state environmental agencies. These types of uses typically include transportation, construction, commercial cleaning and medical uses. State agencies report to regional and national U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offices who use the data primarily to track handler permit or closure status, compliant with Federal and State regulations, and cleanup activities. There are six handlers in Chouteau County listed in the database.

6. Wetlands

Once, wetlands were considered wastelands that should be drained and filled. It is estimated that about one-fourth of Montana's wetlands have been lost to agriculture and urbanization. Today, wetlands are valued for providing wildlife habitat, improving water quality, recharging aquifers and flood control.

- Wetlands Defined - "Wetlands are those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas." (Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in "The Wetlands Delineation Manual of 1987)

- Wetland Regulations - The Clean Water Act (CWA)1972 administered by the Environmental Protection Agency, the Army Corps of Engineers, and state agencies is the most common regulation that land owners will deal with regarding wetlands. Section 401 & 402 Requires that states review and certify permits that may result in pollution discharges into surface waters and wetlands and established a permit system for this process. Section 404 jointly administered by the ACOE and EPA, governs dredging and filling of land. Additionally, the Montana Environmental Policy Act, Montana Administrative Rules, and the Endangered Species Act also regulate activities that may affect wetlands.

Table 10: Wetlands at Risk in Chouteau County

Birch Creek	Perennial Stream. Healthy but with problems due to grazing
Sand Creek	Ephemeral Stream. Rocky channels, poorly vegetated. Decreased stability. Riparian area becoming narrower.
Arrow Creek	Perennial Stream. Weeds.
Big Sandy	DEQ High Priority Wetland. DOT Mitigation Wetland. Intermittent stream.
Marias River	Functional but at Risk.

Source: Montana Department of Environmental Quality

10. County Land Use Regulations

1. Development Permit Regulations

In 1977, Chouteau County adopted its first Comprehensive Plan. About the same time the Bureau of Land Management designated the Missouri River as a "National Wild and Scenic River" . From 1977 to 1985, there were a series of meeting and hearings that led to the adoption of the Chouteau County Development Regulations. Development permits are required for commercial and industrial buildings and certain types of residential buildings. Additionally, parcels in zones along the Wild and Scenic Missouri River are subject to permitting. The regulations created two zones controlling development zones along the Wild and Scenic Missouri River.

The first zone extends from Coal Banks Landing Recreation Area to the eastern Chouteau County line while the second zone extends from Fort Benton to Coal Banks Landing. In 1997, Chouteau County adopted a new plan and revised the development regulations. Provisions in the new regulations include:

Zone 1 – New residential development, including subdivisions, must be set back 3 horizontal miles on either side of the channel of the Missouri River when development would be visible along a line of sight from any point between the high water marks.

Zone 2 – Structures in new residential development, including subdivisions, must be set back 400 horizontal feet from the high water marks. All lots fronting along the river must have at least 400 linear feet of river frontage. Additionally, Residential development may not exceed density of 1 dwelling unit per acre and individual developments or subdivisions may include no more than 20 dwelling units. Mobile homes must not be more than five years old and must be skirted.

2. Subdivision Regulations

The Subdivision is the division of land that creates one or more parcels for the purpose of selling, renting, leasing or conveying the land. In Montana, subdivisions that create parcels containing less than 160 acres (excluding right-of-ways) are subject to the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act (MSPA_MCA 76-3). In addition to the state code, subdivisions are subject to local regulations.

Subdivision of land within the County is regulated by the Chouteau County Subdivision Regulations. These regulations have been amended and are based on the Montana Model Subdivision Regulations that were developed so local governments could adopt regulations that comply with the Montana Code Annotated. Chouteau County's Subdivision regulations were updated in 2006.

11. Malmstrom Air Force Base Joint Land Use Study

In 2012 Cascade County, along with the other Malmstrom AFB Missile Complex Counties, completed a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS). The JLUS was a seven county effort to identify potential conflicts with surrounding land uses and the military operations. Chouteau County was one of the counties that participated in the effort. The Study identified strategies to bolster communications between the military, landowners and local governments. The JLUS made recommendations regarding updating growth policies to incorporate language related to potential conflicts between development and the military mission. In Choutea County, concerns relate to possible incompatible development near missile silos.

NATURAL RESOURCES

OVERVIEW

- Annual precipitation in the county ranges from 12.5 inches in Big Sandy to 32.9 inches in the Highwood Mountains.
- Vegetation in riparian areas is threatened by stream flows and agricultural uses.
- Noxious weeds are an on-going concern and management requires a coordinated effort between the County the State, BLM and the USFS.
- There are seven watersheds covering parts of the County. All watersheds have varying degrees of impairment but streambank destabilization and habitat alteration are common concerns.
- The Teton River Watershed group is an example of successful efforts to address watershed issues. A TMDL plan for Big Sandy Creeks includes cooperative efforts by a number of groups.
- Groundwater resources are limited and concentration of minerals results in areas where water is not potable. There are also limited surface water resources and some secondary streams dry-up in winter. This requires hauling of potable water in some areas.
- The Teton River Basin is among streams subject to legislative closure to certain new appropriations of water.
- The County has a varied and dramatic geological landscape offering fertile soils for crops, mountain ranges for timber and recreation, some natural gas resources, gravel deposits and stunning visual resources.
- Overall, the County has exceptional year-round air quality. On windy days there may be some non-point sources of particulate matter from road and crop dust or haze from forest fires elsewhere in the State. The wind may also be a resource for renewable energy development.
- There is an abundance of fish and wildlife species in the county reflecting the variety in landscape and natural resources.
- The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument Record of Decision and the Resource Management Plan were adopted in 2009.

1. Climate

A. Climate Data

The overall climate for Chouteau is semi-arid with cold and dry weather in winter and warm with slightly more precipitation during the summer months. January is the coldest month of the year while July is the warmest month of the year. In winter arctic cold temperatures from the north can result in sub-zero readings. Chinook winds, however, can interrupt cold weather with 60-degree readings in January. The growing season, defined as the number of days with lows exceeding 32 degrees, averages around 130 days and typically last between May 15t through September 20.

Annual precipitation in Chouteau County ranges from a low of 12.5 inches of annual rainfall in Big Sandy to a high of 32.9 inches in the Highwood Mountains. The average snowfall ranges from 18.9 inches in Big Sandy to 132 inches of snow in Shonkin.

Table 1: Climate Data in Chouteau County- 1981 - 2010

Weather Station	Jan. Avg. Min – Max Temp	July Avg. Min – Max Temp	Annual Precipitation	Annual Snowfall
Big Sandy	6.8 – 30.5	54.2 – 83.4	12.5	18.9
Fort Benton	10.0 – 38.1	51.8 – 85.5	13.3	57.3
Geraldine	12.3 – 37.2	52.2 – 84.7	15.8	56.7
Loma	9.2 – 35.0	54.6 – 85.9	13.0	43.9

Source: http://www.climate.umt.edu/atlas/precipitation/default.php

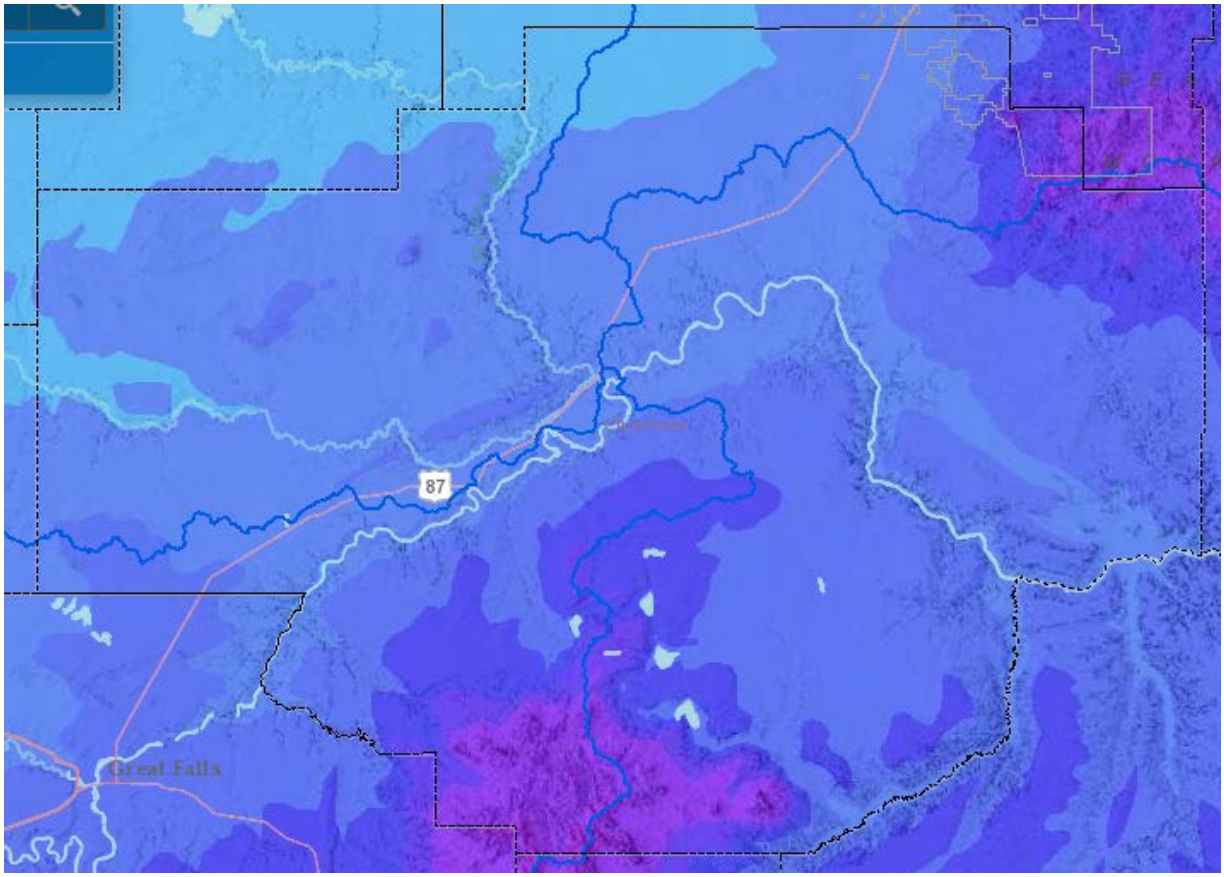
B. Climate Change

In 2005, the Governor directed the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to establish a Climate Change Advisory Committee (CCAC). The CCAC was charged with evaluating state-level greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and identifying reduction opportunities in various sectors of Montana's economy. The Committee's report is available on-line (http://www.deq.mt.gov/ClimateChange/default.mcpx).

The report noted that between 1990 and 2005, there was a 14% increase in GHG. Consequently, Montana now has a per capita rate of GHG emissions that is nearly double the national average. The reasons for this include the state's large fossil fuel production industry, substantial agricultural industry, long travel distances, high heating demands, and low population base. The electricity and agriculture sectors each account for 26% of emissions while the transportation sectors account for 20% of emissions. Montana has a significant fossil fuel production sector that accounts for 11% of gross GHG emissions.

The Committee agreed on 54 recommendations to reduce GHG emissions. These recommendations focused on energy conservation, promoting renewable energy sources, fuel efficiency in vehicles, open space preservation, and efficient use of resources. Recommendations related directly to land use include promoting infill development, mixed-use development, and transit to reduce the total amount of vehicle miles traveled.

Figure 1: **Mean annual precipitation for the years 1981-2010**



Precipitation - Annual Mean (in.)

- > 50
- 40-50
- 30-40
- 20-30
- 18-20
- 16-18
- 14-16
- 12-14
- 10-12
- < 10

Source: *http://www.climate.umt.edu/atlas/precipitation/default.php*

2. Vegetation

Vegetation in Chouteau County consists of cropland, pasture and hayland, rangeland, forestland, and vegetation along riparian areas. Crop yields are described in the Economics Chapter. Following is a description of some of the other types of vegetation.

A. Riparian Areas

Riparian communities along the perennial drainages and larger intermittent streams are often dominated by cottonwood and willow with occasional stands of green ash and boxelder. The understory often consists of woody plants such as chokecherry, buffalo berry, sumac, currant, grasses, and forbs. The higher terraces adjacent to the floodplains are often dominated by silver sage or greasewood with a grass understory. Recent studies show a severe lack of regeneration of cottonwood, willow, and understory species on the Missouri River. Major factors affecting regeneration are flow manipulation by upstream dams on the Missouri River and continual hot season use by livestock.

B. Rangeland

Rangeland vegetation consists of sagebrush grasslands, grasslands, and forestlands. Mixed shrub communities are common in coulees and benches throughout all of these vegetation types. Common grasses and grasslike species include bluebunch wheatgrass, green needle-grass, needle and thread, western wheatgrass, prairie junegrass, blue grama, prairie sandreed, Sandberg bluegrass, and threadleaf sedge. Introduced grasses are found in some areas, either in pure stands or inter-mingled with native species.

C. Forest Areas

Forestlands are located in the Bear Paw and Highwood Mountains. There has been very little logging on the forestlands. The primary land uses of the forested land are grazing and recreation. Resource concerns include timber management, access, road building, streamside management zones, protecting and improving riparian habitats, and noxious weeds. Pine beetle infestations are a recent concern.

D. Species of Special Concern

The Montana Natural Heritage Program, the Bureau of Land Management, the US Forest Service (USFS) and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) maintain a databases of plant species of special concern in the state. The term “species of special concern” includes plants that are rare, endemic, disjunct, threatened or endangered throughout the range, vulnerable to extirpation, or need further research. Chouteau County has three species of special concern that are listed as “sensitive” on the BLM database. They include:

- Square-stem Monkeyflower
- Little Indian Breadroot
- Northern Buttercup

Source: http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern/?AorP=p

E. Noxious Weeds

Noxious weeds are nonnative species that impact the ecological integrity of Montana's lands and waters. The impacts of weeds cost farmers over $100 million annually in crop production losses and expenses. The County Weed Districts in Montana implement the Montana County Weed Control Act, conduct weed education and awareness programs, develop cooperative agreements, manage noxious weeds on county-owned/controlled lands and rights-of way, coordinate weed management activities within and among counties, and monitor weed infestations on private and public lands. The county weed control district must also develop a district-wide noxious weed management plan.

Lands that are managed by local government, such as City Street Departments, airports, parks, cemeteries, sewer and water districts, fairgrounds, historical museums, and schools agencies are often a vector for introduction and spread of noxious weeds. Chouteau County does control for weed within the Town limits. All new construction must submit a weed plan to the County for approval. Noxious weeds in Category 1 are currently established and are generally widespread in many counties of the state. All of the following weeds are reported in Chouteau County.

1. whitetop complex (*Cardaria draba,C. pubescens, C. chalepensis*)
2. diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*)
3. spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*)
4. Russian knapweed (*Centaurea repens* [*Acroptilon repens*])
5. oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum L.*)
6. Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
7. field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*)
8. houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale L.*)
9. leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
10. St. Johnswort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
11. Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica*)
12. yellow toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*)
13. sulfur cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*)
14. common tansy (*Tanacetum vulare*)
15. Tanarisk (Category 2)
16. Perennial Pepperweed (Category 2)

Recommendations for preventing the spread of noxious weeds include the following:

- Limiting the introduction of weed seeds into an area;
- Early detection and eradication of small patches of weeds;
- Minimizing disturbance of desirable vegetation along roadsides, trails, and waterways;
- Managing land to build and maintain healthy communities of native and desirable plants;
- Careful monitoring of high-risk areas such as human and animal transportation corridors disturbed or bare ground;
- Revegetating disturbed sites with desirable plants; and
- Evaluating annually the effectiveness of the prevention plan so appropriate adaptations can be implemented the following year.

Source: www.weedcenter.org & ; http://agr.mt.gov/agr/Programs/Weeds/

3. Watersheds

The watershed is the total area drained by a river and its tributaries. More frequently they are the basis for managing water resources. Traditionally, water quality improvements have focused on specific sources of pollution, such as sewage discharges. While this approach may be successful in addressing specific issues, it often fails to address the chronic problems that contribute to a watershed's decline. Watershed management addresses a wide a range of factors that contribute to a healthy watershed. Statewide groups such as the Montana River Action Network and local groups such as the Teton River Watershed Group coordinate watershed planning efforts.

In 1997, the Montana Legislature charged the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) with restoring the water quality of streams and lakes that do not support irrigation, fisheries and recreation; or provide drinking water, stockwater and wildlife habitat. DEQ is developing these water quality restoration plans for each watershed in the state. The plans establishes Total Daily Maximum Loads (TMDL) for each pollutant entering a body of water to achieve water quality standards. "TMDL" relates to the amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can assimilate and still meet water quality standards.

DEQ works with wastewater dischargers, local conservation districts and watershed groups, and state and federal agencies to develop plans for threatened or impaired waterbodies or segments of waterbodies. For point source discharges, the waste load allocation of the TMDL are incorporated into a regulatory permit. For nonpoint sources, DEQ coordinates with local agencies and land owner/managers and provides technical assistance on implementing voluntary practices to achieve the water quality goals of the TMDL.

A. Belt Watershed

This watershed, which is found in the southern part of the County, includes parts of Cascade, Chouteau, Judith Basin and Meagher Counties. It is Upstream of the Upper-Missouri/Dearborn Watershed. There are 5 waterbodies listed by the State as part of the watershed. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assessment indicates following impairments:

- Metals, lead, copper, cadium,
- Siltation,
- Habitat alteration
- Streamback destabilization.

Many of the impairments can be attributed to past mining activities in the watershed. According to the Montana DEQ website, the Watershed Restoration Plan – TMDL is underway.

Figure 2 : Belt Watershed

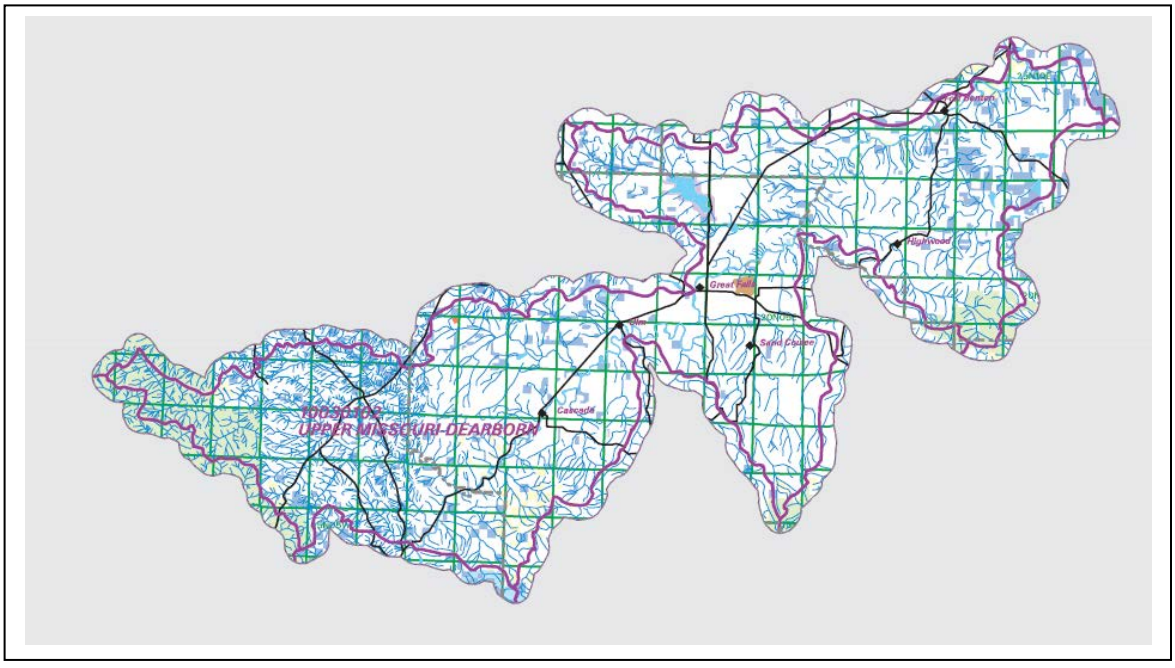
B. Upper Missouri - Dearborn Watershed

The Missouri River is a tributary of the Mississippi River with a total length of 611.2 miles. The Missouri River headwaters are located in Gallatin County. The Upper Missouri – Dearborn Watershed encompasses 2662.74 square miles and is comprised of forest riparian and agricultural/urban riparian habitats. There are 37 rivers and streams in the watershed for a total of 3,618 river miles and 139 lakes with a total of 2,008 acres of surface area.

The Dearborn portion of the watershed is located completely in Cascade and Lewis and Clark Counties. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality has completed a Water Quality Restoration – TMDL plan for this portion of the Watershed. The Upper Missouri portion of the watershed is located primarily in Chouteau and Fergus Counties. The Bureau of Land Management has prepared a environmental assessment for this portion of the watershed in relation to the grazing leases it manages in this watershed. ("Environmental Assessment – Upper Missouri Watershed", MT 060-02-04 - http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/Watershed_Plans.html). The EA covers the watershed affecting the stretch of the Missouri River from Coal Banks landing to eleven miles downstream of Stafford Ferry. It addresses issues regarding riparian health, upland health, weeds and sage grouse. The EA proposed action is to continue current land uses with corrective actions to meet management goals for these issue areas. The EA contains guidelines for best practices.

The Missouri River Council is a consortium of Conservation Districts along the Missouri River that coordinate on activities and address watershed health issues. (http://www.missouririvercouncil.info/)

Figure 3 : Upper Missouri – Dearborn Watershed



Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, http://nris.mt.gov/

C. Teton River Watershed

The Teton watershed is located on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountain Front in west central Montana. Across the western third of the watershed Muddy Creek, the Teton River, and Deep Creek spill out onto the foothill prairie. The prairie landscape has much less relief than the mountain front but contains numerous buttes and low ridges. A dendritic, or branching, drainage pattern begins to form on the prairies once the streams leave the fault-controlled headwaters. The eastern two-thirds of the watershed is characterized by highly-dissected coulees and low river breaklands typical of the glaciated high plains in the western central Montana. The watersheds highest elevation is 9,400 feet along the continental divide and its lowest elevation is roughly 2,600 feet near the mouth at Loma.

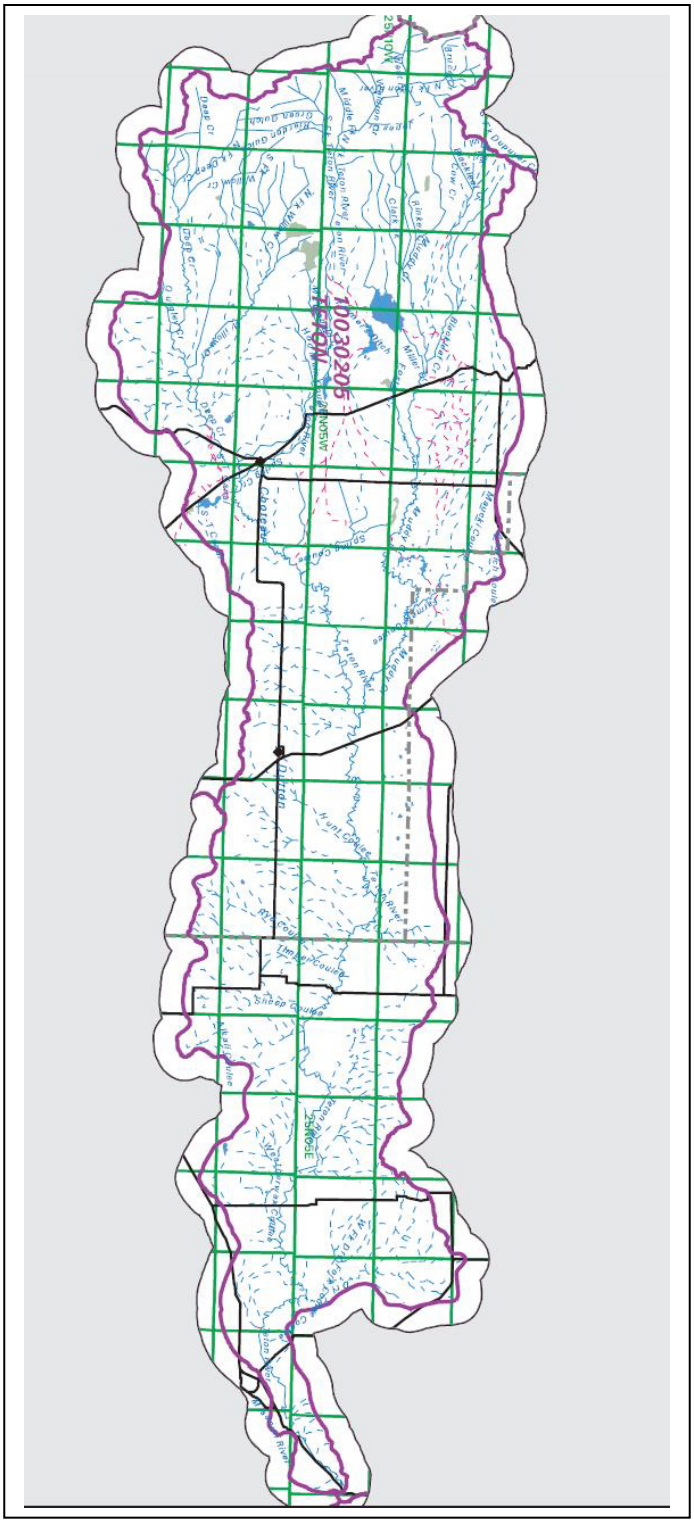
The most common concerns include flow and habitat alteration, siltation, and suspended solids. The dewatering of the Teton River on nearly an annual basis has been identified as a concern by a multi-county watershed-group. The Teton River Watershed Group leads the watershed effort with the support and guidance of the Teton and Chouteau Counties Conservation Districts. In the spring of 1994 land owners met to discuss resource concerns associated with the Teton River and adjacent lands, primarily focusing on water quality and quantity and weeds. Since then the group has undertaken a number of watershed restoration activities such as data gathering, assessments, testing, monitoring, stream stake stabilization projects, and weed control programs.

The DEQ listed the Teton River as an impaired waterbody and approved a 303(d) TMDL plan. The Plan was a cooperative effort of the State. The Teton River watershed is connected to the Sun River watershed via man-made canals and irrigation works. The development of each of these plans was done in close coordination since water quality in the Teton River basin is intricately linked to actions in the Sun River basin.

Most impairment listings across the watershed result from salinity, riparian degradation, stream channel instability (bank erosion and sedimentation), and flow alteration. Sources are varied, but predominantly result from the effects of the 1964 flood or relate to agricultural land uses and associated practices. The 1964 flood altered the course of the river channel in many places ultimately reducing the overall stream length roughly 35 miles and, in some cases, formed new channels through existing agricultural lands where riparian vegetation did not exist.

The plan recommends "Best Management Practices" for salinity and selenium to counter elevated shallow groundwater levels or that reduce the magnitude of groundwater flows. An adaptive management approach to monitoring will be used in the Teton River watershed. Adaptive management is a process that uses monitoring, research, and evaluation to determine results of land management changes and/or restoration activities. It monitors conditions and provides a basis for future review and revision of the TMDL.

Figure 4 : Teton Watershed



Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, http://nris.mt.gov/

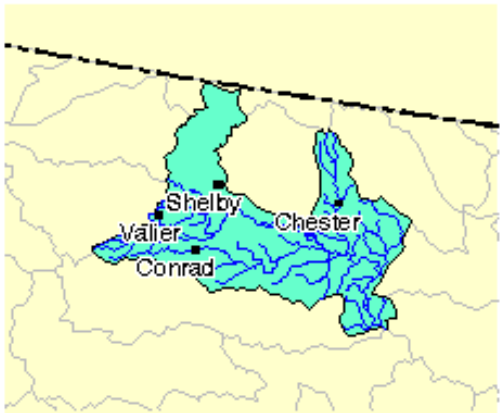
D. Marias Watershed

This watershed includes parts of Chouteau, Glacier, Hill, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, and Toole Counties. It is upstream of the Two Medicine, Cut Bank, Willow and Teton watersheds. It is downstream of the Bullwaker-Dog Watershed. Just the northwest corner of Chouteau County is located in this watershed. The EPA assessment indicates the following impairments.

- Flow Alteration
- Streambank Destabilization
- Mecury/Metals
- Nutrients
- Habitat Alteration
- Thermal Modification

The Maria River Watershed Group is working on issues in this watershed. The Group can be reached through the Liberty County Conservation District.

Figure 5: Marias Watershed

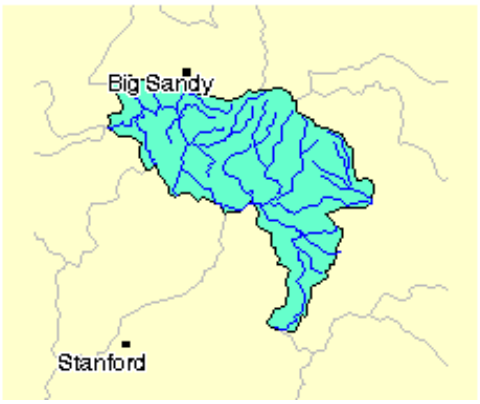


E. Bullwacker-Dog

This watershed includes parts of Chouteau, Blaine, Hill and Fergus Counties. It is upstream of the Upper-Missouri, Marias, Arrow, and Judith watersheds. It is downstream of the Fort Peck watershed. Impairments include:

- Metals-Mecury-Copper
- Habitat Alteration

Figure 6: Bullwaker-Dog Watershed



F. Arrow

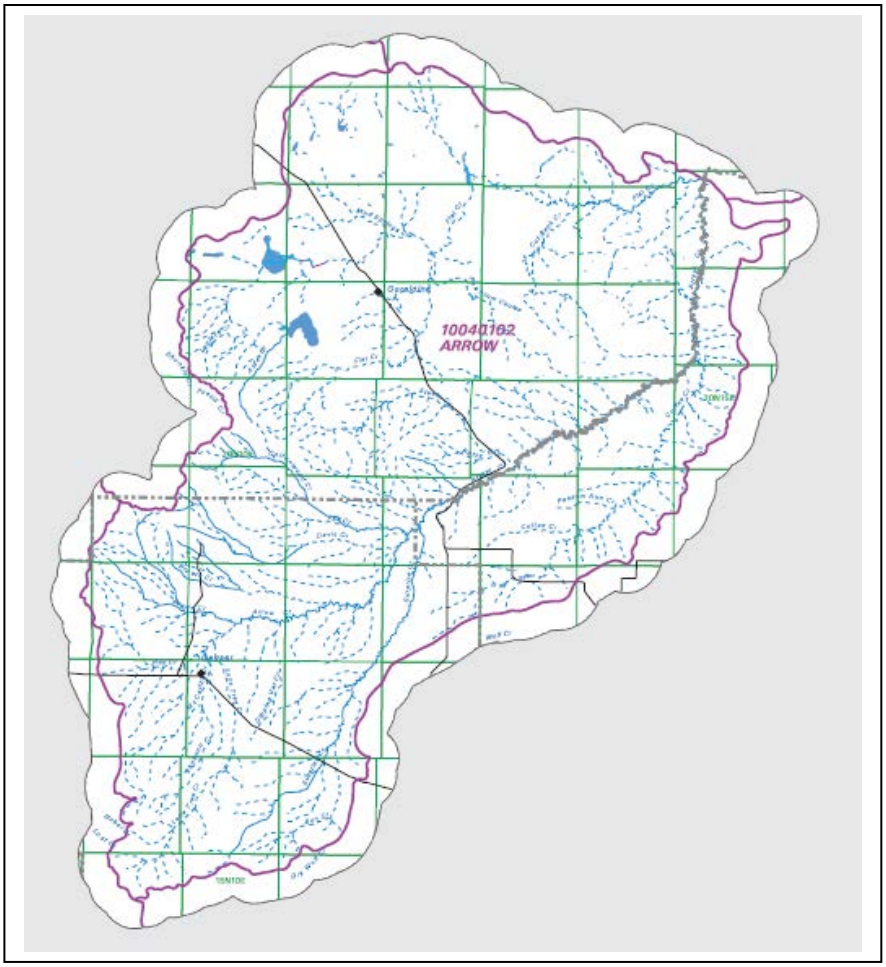
The Upper Arrow Creek Watershed area is located in parts of Chouteau, Fergus and Judith Basin Counties, Montana. It contains portions of Dog, Taffy, Wolf and Upper Arrow Creeks, the Judith River and glaciated plains areas. The U.S. Bureau of Land Management completed two environmental assessments of the watershed relationship to the grazing leases it manages in the area.

- "Environmental Assessment –Upper Arrow Creek Watershed", MT 060-08-055
- "Environmental Assessment and Plan for Arrow Creek/Upper River Whiskey Ridge Landscape", MT 060-02-12

Source: http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/Watershed_Plans.html

Figure 7 : Arrow Creek Watershed

Both EA's address issues of riparian health, upland health and noxious weeds. There is also a need to manage for forest health and wildland fire management in the Whiskey River landscape. Additionally, the Upper Arrow Creek EA notes issues of water quality and bio-diversity. The EA's note the need to coordinate with other planning efforts, particularly the Upper Missouri River Wild and Scenic River plans. Both plans recommend maintaining current land uses with modified terms and conditions to meet standards for rangeland health and forest health. Best practices are included in the EAs.



Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, http://nris.mt.gov/

G. Big Sandy Watershed

Big Sandy Creek is a tributary to the Milk River in north central Montana and has its headwaters in the Bears Paw Mountains. The majority of the basin is in private ownership or is part of the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. Other prominent land management agencies include the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Lonesome Lake area and the state of Montana with scattered parcels throughout the basin.

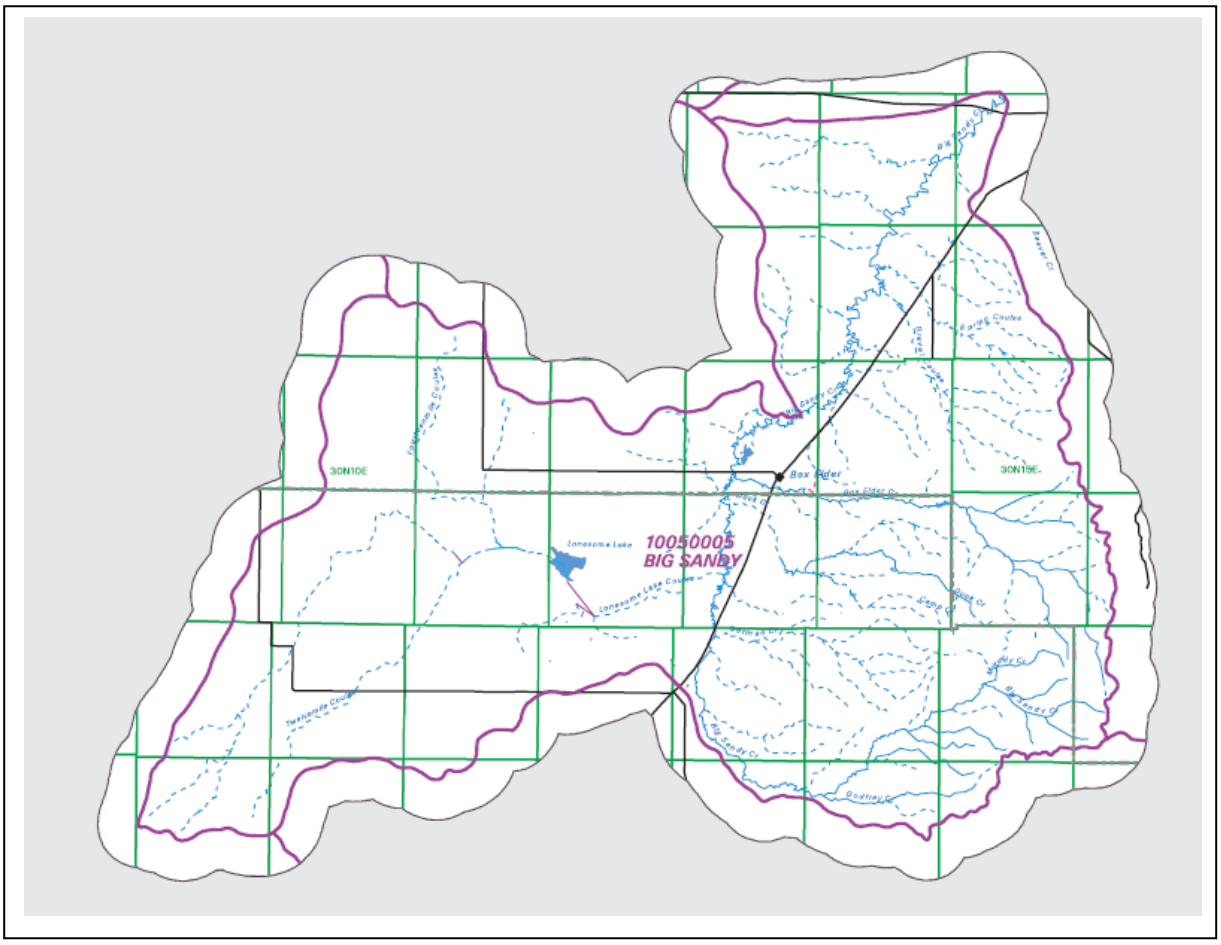
Primary land uses in this sparsely populated, rural area includes dry-land crop production and livestock grazing, as well as evergreen forest in the Bears Paw Mountains. Primary land uses in the Big Sandy Creek watershed include dry-land grain production and livestock grazing. Crop/fallow cropping practices and other agricultural practices that store soil moisture are the primary sources of anthropogenic salinity.

The TMDL plan, approved in 2002, proposes a phased, or adaptive management approach to water quality restoration. DEQ will assess water quality to determine whether water quality standards are attained. DEQ's monitoring program will include long-term monitoring to determine the effectiveness of voluntary measures. If monitoring shows that water quality standards are not achieved within five-years after approval of a TMDL, the DEQ will evaluate the progress made in restoring water quality based on voluntary implementation of reasonable land, soil, and water conservation practices.

The Big Sandy Conservation District, Hill County Conservation District, Rocky Boy's Conservation District, and Chippewa Cree Tribe cooperatively completed an aerial assessment of the Big Sandy Creek Watershed (Big Sandy CD, 2000). The assessment is intended to help local people prioritize and focus on reaches of concern.

Best management practices for reducing the effects of saline seep and bank erosion in the watershed are appropriate actions to achieve water quality standards for salinity/total dissolved solids/sulfates. Landowners who wish to participate in stabilizing saline seeps may be able to obtain cost-share grants for restoration activities. Farmers in saline seep recharge areas should consider changing from crop/fallow to other farming options such as continuous cropping. Landowners who wish to participate in bank stabilization activities may be able to obtain cost-share grant funds for restoration activities.

Figure 8: Big Sandy Watershed



Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, http://nris.mt.gov/

4. Water Quality

A. Impaired Waters

Section 303(d) of the federal Clean Water Act requires states to identify state waters where quality is impaired (does not fully meet standards) or threatened (is likely to violate standards in the near future). Every two years the states are required to submit a list of these impaired or threatened waters to the EPA. This "303(d) List" must prioritize the waterbodies in order to develop plans to bring the listed waters into compliance with water quality standards.

The Monitoring and Data Management Bureau (Bureau) of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has responsibility under the Federal Clean Water Act and Montana Water Quality Act to monitor and assess the quality of Montana surface waters and to identify impaired or threatened stream segments and lakes. Table 2 is a list of all streams on the 303(d) list along with the specific treat or impairment, and the probable cause. From the types of probably causes of stream impairment, it can be concluded that best management land use and agricultural practice could be very effective in reducing non-point pollution in these water bodies.

Table 2 : List of Impaired Streams with Probable Causes and Sources

Waterbody	***Impairment - Probable Causes***	***Probable Sources***
Arrow Creek	Iron	Natural
Belt Creek	Alteration in stream-side or littoral vegetative covers, Arsenic, Chromium, copper, lead, salinity, zinc, sedimentation, other	Channelization, Grazing in Riparian or Shoreline Zones, New Construction of Highways, Roads, Bridges, Infrastructure; Acid Mine Drainage Impacts from Abandoned Mine Lands;
Big Sandy	Mecury, Salinity, Sulfates, Total Dissolved Solids	Atmospheric Deposition, Agriculture Crop Production (Crop Land or Dry Land) Natural Sources
Lake Creek	Cadmium, flow alterations, salinity, sedimentation/siltation, selenium, zinc	Agriculture, Impacts from Hydrostructure Flow Regulation/modification Irrigated Crop Production
Missouri River (Morony Dam to Marias River)	Aluminum, Arsenic, Cadmium, Chlorophyll, Copper, Iron, Lead, Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Sedimentation, Siltation, Zinc	Agriculture, Industrial Point Source Discharge, Dam or Impoundment Streambank Modifications/destablization
Missouri River (Marias River to Bullwacker Dog)	Alteration in stream-side or littoral vegetative covers, Copper, Lead, Physical substrate habitat alterations	Agriculture Grazing in Riparian or Shoreline Zones
Pondera Creek/ Coulee	Alteration in stream-side or littoral vegetative covers, Physical substrate habitat alterations, salinity	Agriculture
Teton	Low flow alterations, salinity, sedimentation Sulfates, total dissolved solids	Flow Alterations, Irrigation, Hydrostructures, Agriculture, stream bank modifications – destabilizations, Highway, Roads, Bridges, channelization

Source: Montana Department of Environmental Quality, http://deq.mt.gov/Water/WQPB/CWAIC

B. Non-point Pollutions

Point source pollution is from a discernible source such as a pipe, ditch, conduit, well or other precise location. "Nonpoint sources" originate from diffuse runoff, seepage, drainage, or infiltration and cannot be traced to a specific polluter. The DEQ "Montana Nonpoint Source Management Plan – 2007", notes the following:

> "NPS pollution is the leading cause of surface water impairments in Montana, accounting for approximately 90 percent of the documented problems in streams and 70 percent of the problems in lakes, reservoirs and wetlands. According to Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) 2006 Statewide Water Quality Assessment, sediment, nutrients, water temperature problems, heavy metals, primarily from nonpoint sources, are responsible for the greatest number of impaired stream miles in Montana relative to other causes of water quality impairment. The pollutants affecting the greatest number of lake and reservoir acres are metals, particularly mercury and lead, sediment, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and nutrients. These pollutants are generated by a variety of land uses, including farming, grazing, logging, mining, roads, urban and suburban development, and many other activities."

Among the most effective methods of controlling non-point pollution is a series land management methods known as "best management practices", or BMPs. Best management practices include measures such as sedimentation barriers, revegetation of disturbed areas, public education on use of fertilizers and pesticides, improved grazing practices that preserve streambanks and streamside vegetation, and a number of stormwater management techniques that include settling ponds and stormceptor-type filters. BMPs can be implemented through management plans, regulations, or simply through the conscientious efforts of ranchers, farmers, and other property owners.

Regulations can also be effective in protecting surface water bodies from non-point pollution. Many communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, and even many in Montana, have adopted regulations such as:

- Streamside setbacks
- Streamside vegetative buffer requirements
- Impervious surface standards
- Limits or prohibition on construction on steep slopes
- Revegetation/restoration plans

5. Groundwater

A. Overview

Groundwater is that part of the rain or snow that infiltrates into the soil and rock to the water table. The unsaturated material above the water table contains air and rock and supports vegetation. In the saturated zone below the water table ground water fills in the spaces between rocks and within bedrock fractures. Two characteristics of all rock that affect the presence and movement of groundwater are porosity and permeability. Unconsolidated material overlies bedrock and may consist of rock debris transported by glaciers or deposited by streams or lakes. This material can store ground water and yield groundwater to wells. Where the groundwater is stored and can readily transmit water to wells or springs, is an aquifer. Where water moves beneath a layer of clay or other dense, low permeability, material it is a confined aquifer and the pressure from the water will cause the water to flow from a well tapped into this source.

Groundwater in the Chouteau County is obtained from three types of aquifers: Sandstone bedrock, glacial outwash, and river alluvium. In general, the sandstone bedrock aquifers are several hundred to several thousand feet below the surface and often contain artesian water in the southwestern portion of the county. Much of the groundwater is highly mineralized and not suitable for human consumption. Groundwater can also be developed at springs, which are numerous though generally low volume. Springs and unconsolidated aquifers of glacial and alluvial gravels commonly produce the best quality water, however wells in shallow aquifers are subject to contamination.

B. Wells

There are 3,053 wells in Chouteau County. The majority are for stockwater use with wells for domestic use being the second most common type. There was a significant increase in test wells between 2010 and 2016. Well depths vary by location and range from shallow depths of 100 feet to over 1000 feet. There were slightly more than one-half of wells with recorded depths are less than 100 feet deep. Another 18% are between 100 and 500 feet in depth. There are about 54 wells that are over 1000 feet.

Table 3: Number of Wells by Select Use in Chouteau County

Use	**2010**	**2016**
Unknown – Other	53	48
Waterflood	12	12
Industrial – Commercial	8	3
Public Water Supply	48	49
Test Well	19	271
Unused	64	64
Fire Protection	3	3
Monitoring	437	518
Irrigation	158	156
Research	37	35
Geotech	48	49
Stockwater	1002	1013
Domestic	803	823
Commercial	n/a	5
Total	**2692**	**3053**

Source: Montana Tech, Groundwater Information Center, http://mbmggwic.mtech.edu/

C. Water Quality

Ground-water quality concerns are hard water, a high concentration of salt or iron, sulfur, methane gas, petroleum or organic compounds, or bacteria. Some of these contaminants are naturally occurring and some are caused by human activities. Among potential threats to ground water quality are:

- Oil Spills- Leaking underground tanks.
- Methane gas – Occurs naturally. Wells need to be vented properly.
- Bacteria – Most common cause is septic-tank effluent.
- Barnyard runoff- Homes should be built upslope of barnyards.
- Pesticides & Fertilizers

6. Surface Waters

The primary surface water sources are the Missouri, Marias, and Teton Rivers. Streams of secondary importance are the Highwood, Shonkin, Big Sandy and Arrow Creek. Some streams dry up in the summer. This requires the hauling of potable water in areas not serviced by community water lines or municipal systems. There are no public reservoirs in the county though large dams and ponds have been constructed for private purposes.

Table 4: Major Water Bodies in Chouteau County.

Name	**Area, Acres**
Missouri River	8421
Kingsbury Lake	1375
Big Lake	1152
Marias River	1022
White Lake	753
Lonesome Lake	731
Shonkin Lake	502
Harwood Lake	387

Source: Montana Dept. of Natural Resource Conservation

7. Water Rights

The Montana Water Use Act (MCA 85-2) contains the following major provisions.

A. Adjudication

All water rights existing prior to July 1, 1973, were to be finalized through a statewide adjudication process in state courts. Since all the claims cannot be adjudicated at once, claims are being decreed by basin for each of Montana's 85 drainage basins. The Marias River, Arrow Creek, Big Sandy Creek and Missouri River have preliminary decrees. (Source: http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/water/adjudication)

B. Permit System

A permit system was established for obtaining water rights for new or additional water developments. The permit system is administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). The DNRC also reviews changes to a permit. A person does not need to apply for a permit to develop a well or a groundwater spring with an anticipated use of 35 gallons per minute or less, not to exceed 10 acre-feet per year. When a person combines an appropriation of two or more wells or developed springs from the same source and uses more than 35 gallons per minute or 10 acre-feet per year a permit is required.

C. Preservation for Future Use

The Act provides for a system to reserve water for future uses and to maintain minimum instream flows for water quality, and fish and wildlife. These include:

- Controlled groundwater areas may be proposed by DNRC, by petition of a state or local public health agency, or by a petition signed by at least 20 or one-fourth, whichever is less, of groundwater. In general, a petition must demonstrate that either current or future groundwater withdrawals are in excess of the recharge to the aquifer, that there are disputes regarding rights, groundwater levels are declining, withdrawals will adversely affecting groundwater quality or water quality within the groundwater area is not suited for a specific beneficial use. There are no controlled groundwater areas within Chouteau County.

- Montana has closed some of its river basins to certain types of new water appropriations due to water availability problems, over appropriation, and a concern for protecting existing water rights. The Teton River Basin and Upper Missouri are among the streams subject to legislative closure to certain new appropriations of water.

    - The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation- Montana Compact has a moratorium on new state appropriations effective April 15, 1997. There is at least a 10-year moratorium on new state permits from sources in the Big Sandy Creek Basin (excluding Sage Creek and Lonesome Lake Coulee) and in the Beaver Creek drainage.

(Source: http://leg.mt.gov/content/Publications/Environmental/2012-water-rights-handbook.pdf)

In Chouteau County, several municipal and public water districts have water reservations on the Missouri River as well as a number of agricultural producers requiring irrigation water.

8. Geology

Chouteau County encompasses 3,973 square miles and has a varied and dramatic landscape. Following are some of the geological features found throughout the County.

A. Big Sandy Watershed

The watershed is composed of isolated mountain ranges of igneous intrusive rocks on broad alluvial valleys. The cores of the Sweet Grass Hills and Bears Paw Mountains are igneous rock that rose in molten form through layers of sedimentary rocks and then cooled. Sedimentary formations dip gently east from the flanks of the Sweet Grass Hills and underlie the eastern portion of the watershed.

The gently rolling plains are mantled by glacial sediments and eroded by storm runoff and stream channels. Glacial deposits of clay, silt, and sand are deposited over an eroded bedrock valley filled with sand and gravel. Soil types in the watershed include loam and fine sandy loam. Soil fertility and erodability vary depending on the percentage of sand in the loams.

B. Teton River Watershed

Chouteau County is in the eastern portion of the Watershed. This section is characterized by younger Cretaceous sedimentary units in the eastern prairies with sandstone, siltstone, and/or shale. In the late Cretaceous period (approximately 65-140 million years BP) erosion carved away the ancestral Rocky Mountains. Remainders of the erosion include gravel beds near Choteau and sand and gravel covered bedrock near Fort Benton. Also during the Cretaceous period, shallow inland seas deposited layers of silt and clay that would become known today as the Colorado Shale. This geological unit covers much of the eastern reach of the Teton River and is associated with water that has relatively increased total dissolved solids, particularly elements such as sodium, chloride, sulfate, and selenium.

Following the Cretaceous period, the Tertiary (approximately 3-65 million years BP) experienced a second period of mountain building, where the present day Rocky Mountains were uplifted. In Montana, the most recent continental glacial event was the Wisconsin glaciations, from about 10,000 to 80,000 years BP. During this time, glacial tills were deposited on the eastern portion of the watershed; these tills have been shown to contain nitrogen, arsenic, and selenium.

C. Upper Missouri - National Monument Area

The Monument is a triangular wedge of federal land lying between three island mountain ranges. At the north apex of the triangle is the Bears Paw Mountain Range. On the east side are the Little Rocky Mountains and to the west side are the Highwood Mountains. All of these ranges are places where magma rose up from the mantle penetrating a two-mile thick layer of sedimentary rocks at various times during the Tertiary period.

The Missouri River Channel, is the central geographic feature of the Monument. Both the Bears Paw and Highwood ranges resulted in volcanic eruptions forming fine grained rocks near, or on the surface. The Bears Paw Mountains were covered by extensive heavy basalt layers. Over time, these slid away from the uplift deforming the near surface sedimentary rocks as they went. The gravity sliding produced a lot of the thrust

faulting that formed the structural traps for natural gas.

Between the Highwood and Bears Paw Mountains sedimentary rocks are tilted and shot through by radiating dikes that, when eroded, form spires and walls of dark igneous rock that contrast with the lighter sedimentary layers they intrude. Northcentral Montana contains an extraordinarily large proportion of all dikes known to exist in North America. Square Butte is the most prominent of these formations.

D. Big Sag

Glacial Lake Great Falls was formed when the Missouri was blocked by 1500 to 2000 feet high sheets of ice near the beginning of the Wisconsin Ice Age, about 15,000 years ago. As the ice melted, water spilled over the north side of the Highwoods, thundering over a tremendous horseshoe cataract. When the water receded , the granite cliffs and Lost Lake remained. The gigantic flow of the Missouri River's new channel carved out the half-mile wide "Big Sag" before joining the Arrow Creek drainage. Part of the Big Sag is visible when traveling south on Highway 80 from Square Butte to Arrow Creek.

9. Topography

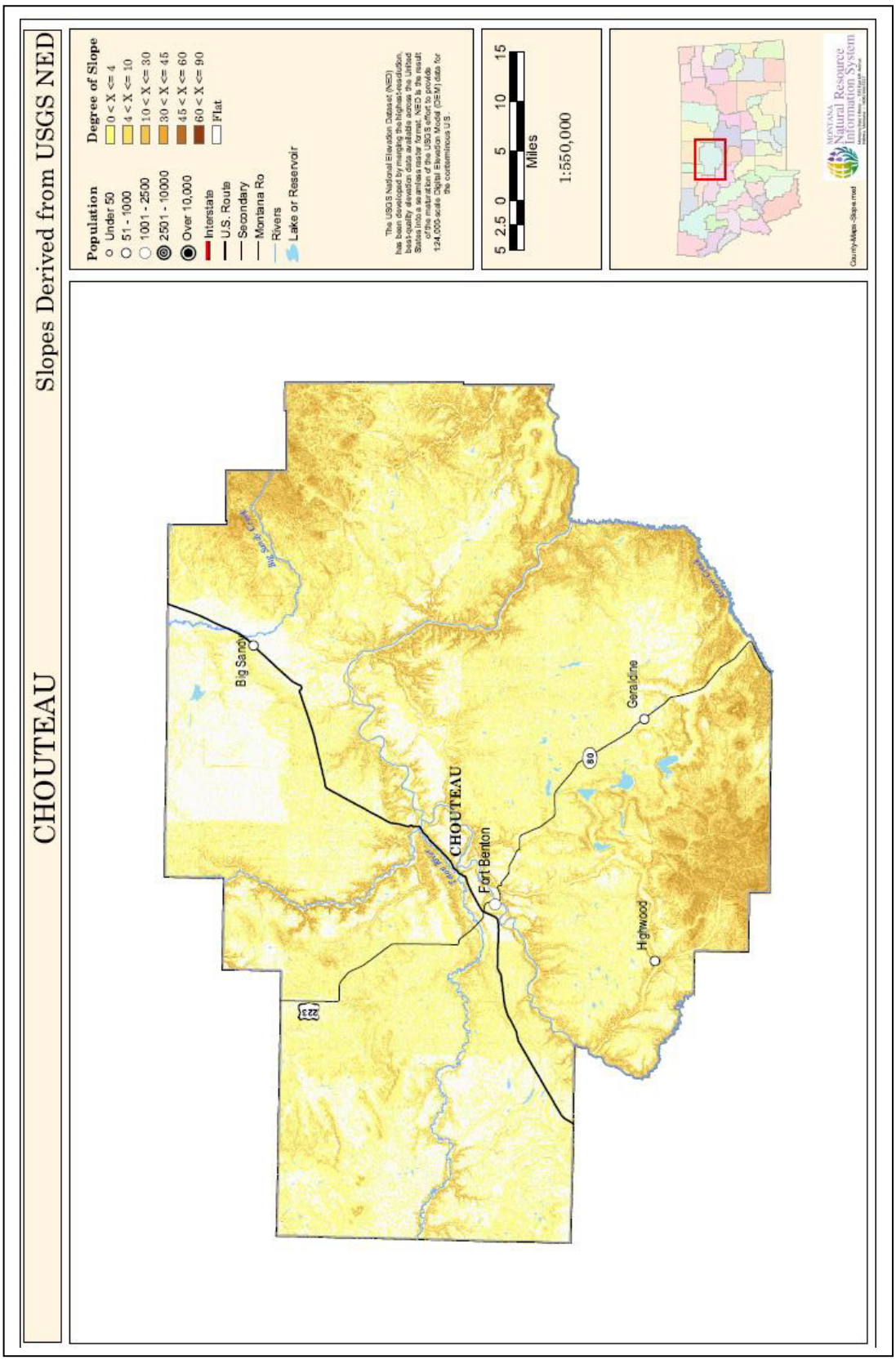
In general, the terrain is primarily benchlands, valleys, coulees and rugged mountains. The two primary mountain ranges are the Bear's Paw and Highwood ranges. The elevations of the County range from 7,680 feet above sea level in the Highwoods to less than 2,300 where the Missouri River leaves the county en route to the Fort Peck Reservoir.

Landslide hazard areas include slopes that are underlain by weak, fine grained unconsolidated sediments, jointed or bedded bedrock, or landslide deposits, including the top and toe of such areas. It is often necessary to conduct a geotechnical analysis to assess potential danger from landslides. However, even when it is determined that a slope is stable, conditions may change due to road cuts, grading, excavation for foundations, or increased runoff and/or seepage into the soil as a result of increased development.

The relationship between slope and water quality has been thoroughly documented. When rain falls on flat ground, it either sinks into the ground or it ponds until it finally does sink in and/or evaporate. When rain falls or snow melts on slopes, the water that does not percolate into the ground will run downhill. When water runs down a steep slope, its velocity increases and it can pick up loose soil particles eventually causing erosion, and sedimentation. When natural terrain is disturbed, for development or other reasons, erosion and sedimentation can be accelerated dramatically.

Development on steep slopes in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) poses several public safety concerns. Access for firefighting equipment can be difficult on roads or driveways with steep grades. During adverse weather conditions, fire vehicles may not be able to travel steep slopes at all. Because fire travels in the direction of the ambient wind, which usually flows uphill, fires will travel uphill much faster than downhill. The steeper the slope, the faster the fire travels. Additionally, the fire is able to preheat the fuel farther up the hill because the smoke and heat are rising in that direction. Due to these fire characteristics, building on steep slopes in the WUI is discouraged.

Figure 9: Slopes in Chouteau County



10. Soils

A. Overview

Soil surveys can help public officials make decisions regarding building permits, septic permits, road alignments, and design of public infrastructure. Soil surveys typically describe the activities and land development types for which soils are best suited, and describe limitations for other uses. Some specific applications for soil surveys follow:

- Planners and other authorities can use soil maps and soil data to identify sources of sediment and to develop plans for controlling erosion and sedimentation.

- Septic tank absorption fields do not work in wet or impermeable soils. Slow permeability may be caused by high clay content or the presence of a high water table. Excessive permeability may allow effluent to pollute ground water.

- The properties that affect road and building construction include depth to bedrock, depth to a water table, ponding, flooding, the amount of large stones, slope, subsidence, shrink-swell potential, and the potential for frost action.

The majority of soils of Chouteau are described as nearly level, undulating, deep well-drained loam soils. These soils are conducive for producing excellent crops. Further, the soils are generally easy to work with when installing sewage drainfields and domestic water wells.

B. Farmland

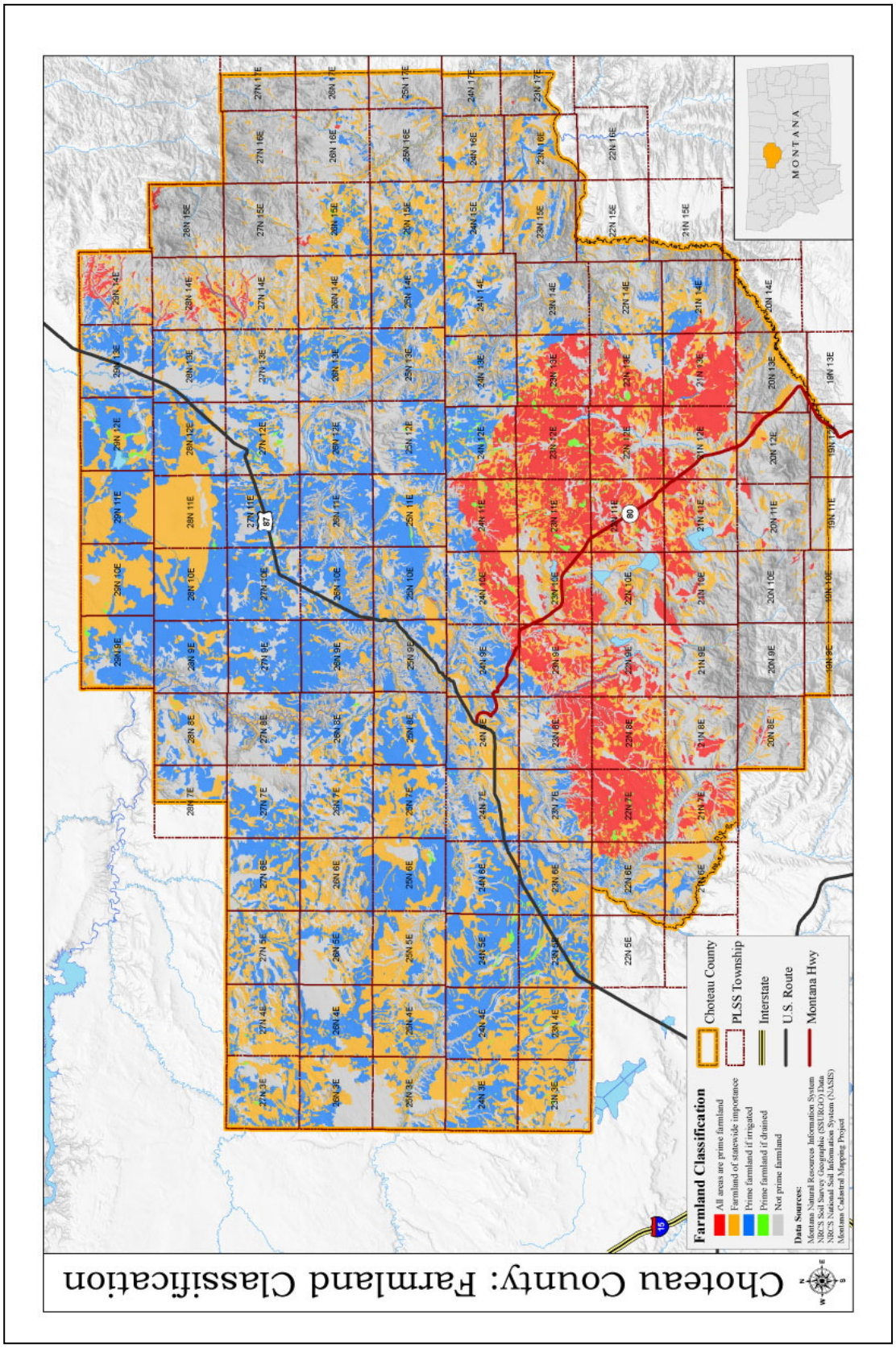
The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resources Conservation Service, in cooperation with other interested Federal, State, and local government organizations, has inventoried land that can be used for the production of the Nation's food supply. A summary of farmland definitions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture follows:

- **Prime farmland** - Is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It could be cultivated land, pastureland, forestland, or other land, but it is not urban or built-up land or water areas. The soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply are those needed for the soil to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when proper management, including water management, and acceptable farming methods are applied. In general, prime farmland has an adequate and dependable supply of moisture from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. The water supply is dependable and of adequate quality. Prime farmland is permeable to water and air. It is not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods, and it either is not frequently flooded during the growing season or is protected from flooding. Slope ranges mainly from 0 to 6 percent.

- **Farmland of statewide importance** - These are determined by the appropriate State agencies. Generally, this land includes areas of soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

- **Farmland of local importance** - This farmland is identified by the appropriate local agencies for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops.."

(Source: http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/HomePage.htm)


Chouteau County: Farmland Classification
MONTANA
Farmland Classification
All areas are prime farmland
Farmland of statewide importance
Prime farmland if irrigated
Prime farmland if drained
Not prime farmland
Data Sources:
Montana Natural Resources Information System
NRCS Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Data
NRCS National Soil Information System (NASIS)
Montana Cadastral Mapping Project
Choteau County
PLSS Township
Interstate
U.S. Route
Montana Hwy

11. Mineral Resources

a. Oil & Gas

The most productive natural gas field in Montana, the Tiger Ridge gas Field sprawls across northeast Chouteau, southern Hill and Blaine Counties. Natural gas development in these areas began in the late 1960's and increased significantly in the 1980's. Of the five counties in the Bear Paw Development Corporation District, Chouteau County is the smallest gas producer. In Chouteau County, production peaked in 2003 with 2,447,423 mcf of natural gas. Production has continually declined since then and in 2016, with production levels at less of only 464,511 mcf. There has been no significant oil production in the County.
Source: Montana Department of Natural Resources, Board of Oil and Gas.
http://bogc.dnrc.mt.gov/WebApps/DataMiner/Production/ProdAnnualCounty.aspx

b. Other Minerals

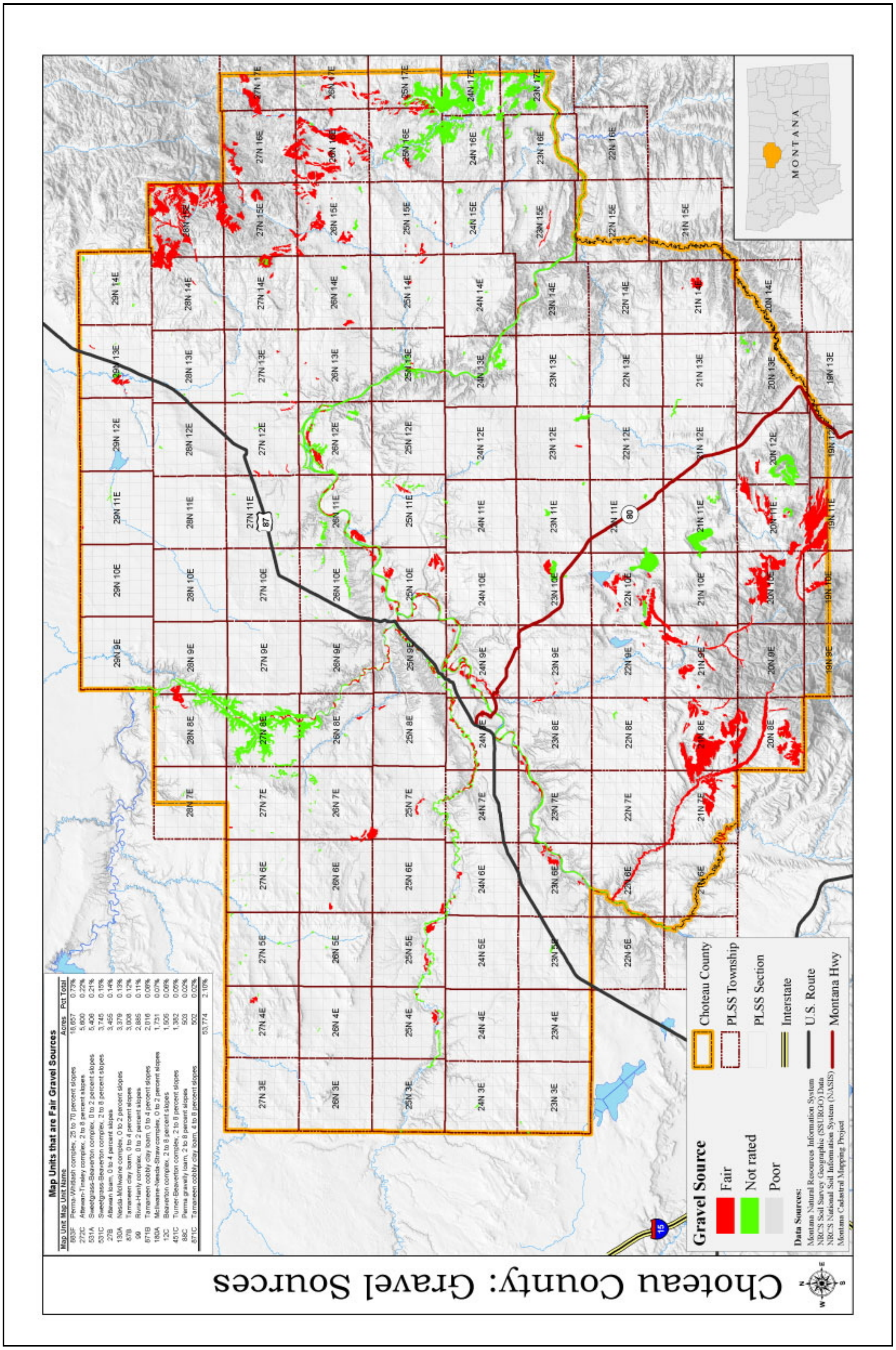
According to the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, no economic metallic mineral deposits, such as gold, silver, or lead are known to exist in the county, although there have been unverified reports of beryl in the vicinity of the Rocky Boy stock, east of Big Sandy. Some coal reserves have been defined. Some occurrences of flourite have been documented, but not in commercial amounts. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the demand for sodium sulphate in the glass industry in the northwest and for the pulp industry in Montana, created an interest in deposits in the county.

c. Gravel deposits

The Montana Bureau of the Mines and Geology reports that glacial outwash scattered over much of the county provides a source of sand and gravel. Terrace alluvium and glaciofluvial gravel deposits are mined for sand and gravel. Physically durable rock suitable for use as riprap or ballast could be quarried at a number of localities in the Highwood Mountains. The Department of Environmental Quality database indicates that there in 2003 there were 50 permits for sand and gravel pits in the County. The majority of the permits belong to the County Road and Bridge Department. Aggregate rock, such as sand and gravel, is an important construction and road maintenance resource for the county. At the same time, mining sand and gravel has environmental impacts and it is important to develop this resource without comprising the quality of the life in the County. Common issues with the locating gravel quarries include:

- Traffic
- Noise
- Dust
- Water Quality
- Visual Buffers
- Impact on adjacent or nearby residential uses

Because gravel mining is often controversial, Montana law now requires that gravel resources be addressed in the growth policy. The following table indicates the location of existing gravel extraction operations in the county:


Choteau County: Gravel Sources
Map Units that are Fair Gravel Sources
Gravel Source
Fair
Not rated
Poor
Choteau County
PLSS Township
PLSS Section
Interstate
U.S. Route
Montana Hwy
Data Sources:
Montana Natural Resources Information System
NRCS Soil Survey Geographic (SSURGO) Data
NRCS National Soil Information System (NASIS)
Montana Cadastral Mapping Project
MONTANA

12. Air Quality

"Chouteau County is located in the Montana Air Quality Control Region (AQCR) – 141 which comprises the north central part of Montana, a region of rolling glaciated plains. The Milk, Marias, Teton, and Missouri Rivers cut across the region from the west to east creating substantial river valleys that are hundreds of feet lower than the upland bench areas. Relatively small, isolated mountain ranges (Highwood, Bear Paw, and Little Rocky) rise up from the plains in the eastern half of the region. The western boundary of the region is formed by the Continental Divide and includes most of the area known as the Rocky Mountain Front. The foothills of the Big and Little Belt Mountains form the southern boundary along with the Missouri River. The eastern boundary cuts across the plains north of the Little Rocky Mountains to the Canadian border, which is the northern boundary of the region."

"With the exception of the isolated mountainous areas most of the region experiences a similar climatological regime with warm dry summers and cold dry winters interrupted by occasional chinooks. Dispersion potential in the region is generally excellent due to persistent and often very strong winds. Temperature inversions in the area, though frequent, are usually shallow and seldom last past noon. The exceptions to this rule are to be found in the mountainous areas and occasionally in the river valleys. "

"During the winter it is possible to have a warm wind blowing along a bench while cold air remains trapped in the bottom of a valley only a few miles away. Persistent inversions have also been noted in the narrow valleys of the Little Rocky Mountains. The wind flow over the region is generally from the west or southwest unless cold northerly winds are sweeping down from the arctic. Precipitation amounts are uniformly low over the entire region." (E*xcerpted from the , "Montana Air Monitoring – 1999 Network Review")*

Of the pollutants that the Environmental Protection agency monitors, only a few pose problems around the State and those are mostly limited to the larger cities in Montana. Particulate matter is the largest air pollution problem in the State. The most important factors contributing to this problem are a combination of meteorology and topography. Mountain valleys and frequent temperature inversions often lead to particulate being trapped close to their emission source for days at a time.

Of concern in Chouteau County are non-point area sources such as road and cropland dust. Extremely windy days increase dust levels from unpaved streets especially in the gravel road system that is common in Chouteau County as well as the poorly protected dry cropland. Dust from cropland has been somewhat mitigated in recent years primarily due to programs such as the Conservation Resource Program. Additionally, there is occasional regional haze in late summer primarily from forest fires in western Montana or in Canada.

Most lands in the county are in a Class II airshed as designated by the 1977 Clean Air Act. A planning and management process, "Prevention of Significant Deterioration" (PSD), was introduced as part of the 1977 Amendment to the Clean Air Act. These PSD requirements set limits for increases in ambient pollution levels and established a system for preconstruction review of new, major pollution sources. Three PSD classes have been established. Class I allows very small increases in pollution; Class II allows somewhat larger increases; and Class III allows the air quality to deteriorate considerably. Nearby Class I areas include Glacier Park and the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

1 3. Fish & Wildlife

The variety in vegetation both along the river and across the valley, as well as the varying geography ranging from riverbanks, side slopes, coulee, and plains, provide habitat for a diverse wildlife population. There are 60 species of mammals, 233 species of birds, and 20 species of amphibians and reptiles that inhabit the Upper Missouri River valley

Forty-nine species of fish (ranging from 1/2-oz. minnows to 140 lb. paddlefish) reside in the Missouri River. The most common for fishing include goldeye, drum, sauger, walleye, northern pike, channel cat, carp, and small mouth buffalo. Of the six remaining paddlefish populations in the United States, the Upper Missouri's appears to be the largest in average size. Other unusual species in the river are the endangered pallid sturgeon and shovel nose sturgeon.

Shoreline areas provide habitat for soft-shelled turtles, beaver and a wide variety of waterfowl. A great variety of wildlife species depend on the riparian zone immediately adjacent to the river bank. Vegetation and wildlife depends upon normal fluctuations in water height and silt load and the river's tendency to meander. High flows recharge groundwater and deposit nutrient rich soils across bottom lands. The river's meandering builds new gravel bars, islands, and new bottom lands to replace those that have become too high and dry for riparian vegetation.

Among the more common species found in the riparian zone are white-tailed deer and pheasant. Bald eagles are again nesting in cottonwood snags. In the bottom lands between the riparian zones and the valley slopes and in the valley slopes and coulees, species include the prairie dog, and mule deer. Fur bearing animals including beaver, muskrat and mink are found in suitable habitat, as are the ubiquitous predators of fox, coyotes, and badgers.

The plains above the valley provide habitat for antelope and game birds. Pheasant are found in areas providing necessary shelter, cover, and winter feed. Non-native Hungarian partridges abound and turkeys are found in suitable riparian habitats. The most important resource issues facing the upland species are the fragmentation of the landscape between native prairie and cropland.

The cliff faces provide perching and nesting habitat for the many raptors that inhabit the river area. Among them the sparrow hawk, prairie falcon, and golden eagle. The bald eagle and the falcon are two endangered or threaten species located in the watershed. The area between Fort Benton and river mile 42 has been identified as high habitat suitability areas for naturally expanding regional bald eagle populations. A primary resource concern is maintaining healthy riparian areas that provide travel corridors for migratory, resident, and big game species.

According to the NRCS Chouteau County Resource Assessment, the Marias and Teton Rivers provide spawning habitat from the Missouri. There are populations of sauger, walleye, and channel catfish but these are impacted by dewatering of the Teton River. There is a need to maintain side channel habitats in the Missouri River and to maintain adequate stream flows on the Teton. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP), Montana Rivers Information System contains specific information about streams and rivers within the State.

14. Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument

a. Overview

The 149 mile stretch of the Upper Missouri River from Fort Benton to US Highway 191 in northcentral Montana was designated as the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River (UMNWSR) in 1976. This stretch of river flows through Chouteau, Blaine, Fergus, and Phillips Counties and includes landscape ranging from riparian vegetation to cliffs, badlands, and the rolling pine covered slopes of the "Breaks". The diverse landscape includes wildlife habitat, livestock grazing, recreational opportunities and other multiple uses. In 2001, this area was declared a National Monument. In addition to this designation, the river is part of the National Historic trail system as part of the Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail and Nez Perce National Historic Trail. There are also six wilderness study areas that partially within the UMNWSR. Antelope Creek WSA is in Chouteau County. The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management oversees the National Monument.

b. Resource Management Plan

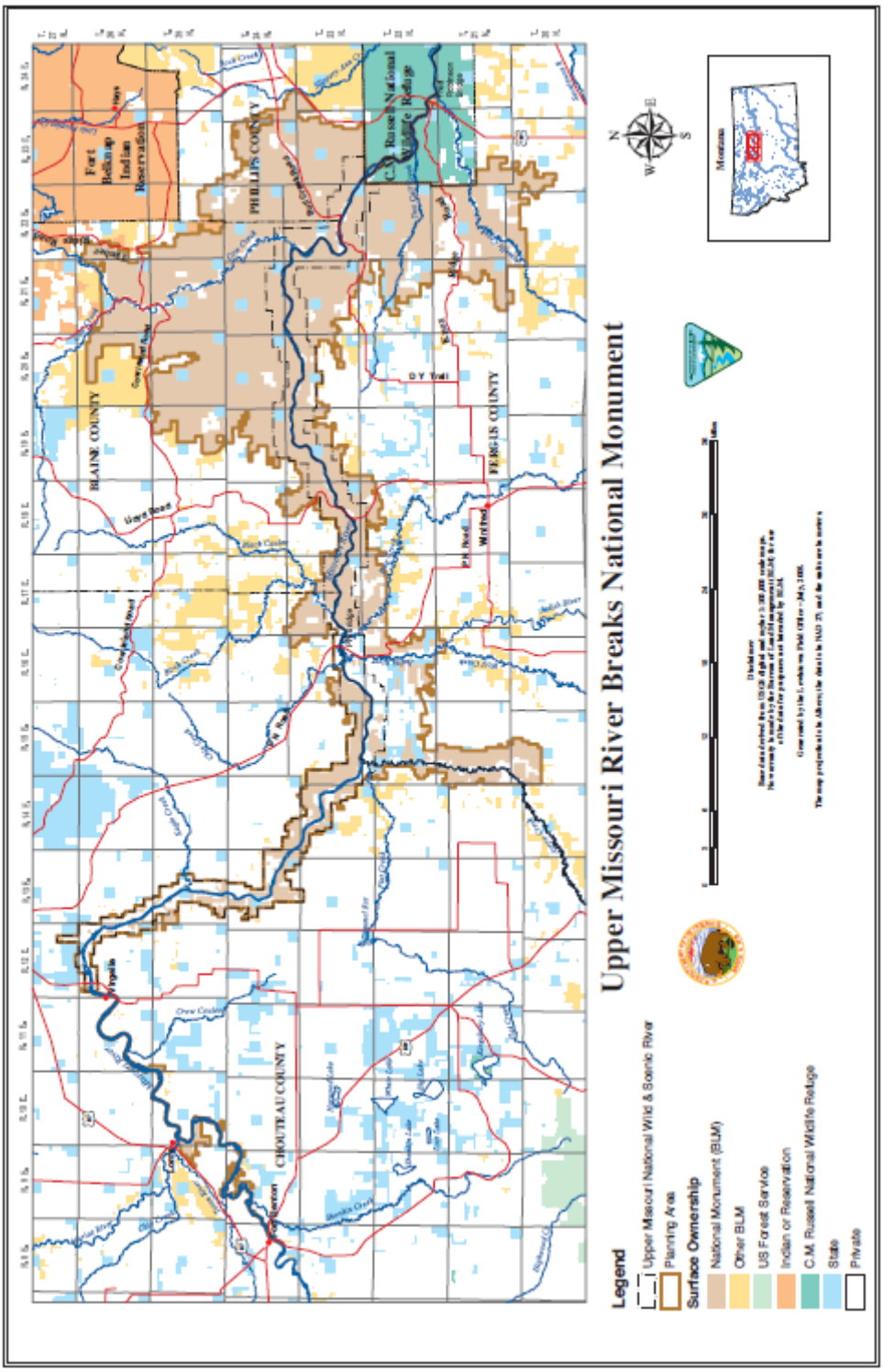
In 2002, the BLM began a process to prepare a revised "Resource Management Plan" and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Record of Decision (ROD) adopting the plan and EIS was issued in 2008. A summary of the approved action is below:

> "The Approved Plan emphasizes protection and restoration of the natural resources while still providing for resource use and enjoyment. Where appropriate, it proposes a combination of management actions including allowing natural processes to continue, applying more treatment methods to achieve a natural range of native plant associations, and protecting the remote settings that currently exist in the Monument." (http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/fo/lewistown_field_office/um_rmp_process/rod.html)

A number of management goals guided the development of alternatives for this RMP. These goals are the result of information provided through public scoping, existing laws and regulations, the Proclamation, and the planning team. These goals include:

- Manage visitor use and services on these BLM lands in a manner that protects Monument values and resources.
- Manage these BLM lands in a multiple use manner consistent with the Proclamation and all current law and policy.
- Manage legal and physical access to and within the Monument to provide opportunities for diverse activities.
- Manage these BLM lands for a variety of sustainable visitor experiences in mostly primitive and natural landscapes.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides a healthy ecosystem supporting plant and animal species and achieves a sustainable variation of native vegetation communities.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that provides current and future generations with the social and economic benefits compatible with the Proclamation.
- Manage these BLM lands in a manner that involves the public and collaborating agencies (local, state, federal and tribal) at every opportunity.

ROD Figure 1
Planning Area



15. Lewis & Clark Forest

a. Overview

The Lewis and Clark Forest encompasses the southeastern portion of Chouteau County. The Lewis and Clark Forest is comprised of two divisions. The Jefferson Division, east of Great Falls, includes the Little Belts, Highwoods, Snowy and Crazy Mountain Ranges. The Rocky Mountain Division spans Lewis and Clark, Teton, Pondera, and Glacier counties. The National Forest land within the Lewis & Clark National Forest has been divided into 18 management areas, each with different goals, resource potential and limitations. The Highwood Geographic Unit is located partially in Chouteau County.

b. Highwood Unit

The Highwood Geographic Unit includes all of the National Forest portion of the Highwood Mountains. Major drainages are the Highwood, martin, Shonkin, Cottonwood, Arrow and Little Belt Creeks. The unit is a mosaic of timber, grass and rock. Slopes are moderately steep. Winter and summer range for elk and deer are scattered throughout the unit. The unit contains the Thain Creek Campground and recreational trails. Although the area has leases for oil and gas there has been little activity. A major fire burned most of the unit at the turn of the previous century. A small amount of post and poles have been harvested. No timber harvest are scheduled until after 2005. Grazing allotments are primarily managed through grazing associations.

c. Planning

The Forest Plan was issued in 1986. The Plan describes resource management practices, levels of resource production and management, and the availability and suitability of lands for resource management. The Plan includes amendments through the year 2000 with the most recent being a travel plan. The last planning process considered several alternatives but the preferred alternative was as follows:

> "Alternative G would increase the use of forest resources, while providing diverse wildlife habitat and maintaining dispersed recreation opportunities in a semi-primitive setting."

An update of the plan is dependent on funding but could get underway in three to five years.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

OVERVIEW

Public facilities include the basic infrastructure such as roads, public water supply, wastewater treatment, and utilities. The capacity of these services indicates the area's ability to handle future growth. The current condition and needed upgrades are important to assess inorder to set priorities for funding. Aging and obsolete facilities, safety, growth pressures, environmental concerns and regulatory requirements are all issues that surround the operation and construction of public facilities. While the facilities located in the County are under the jurisdiction of various taxing districts and, in the case of utilities, private business, the County government still plays an important role in establishing policies that coordinate activities between agencies, facilitating the process for upgrades, and directing growth where there are adequate facilities. Following are key findings that may influence these policies.

- Most roads under County jurisdiction are gravel and designed for low-volumes of traffic. The County is divided into three road districts to maintain the roads and bridges.
- There is no Interstate access in the County. Traffic volumes are heaviest on U.S. Highway 87 from Fort Benton to Great Falls.
- There are general aviation airports in Fort Benton, Big Sandy and Geraldine. Capital improvements identified for Fort Benton include taxiway and fuel station upgrades.
- Central Montana Rail between Denton and Geraldine carries a low volume of rail traffic and is classified at risk by the Montana Department of Transportation.
- A number of rural water districts and the town of Big Sandy are at capacity and can not handle additional users. Fort Benton, Geraldine, and Highwood have adequate capacity to handle growth.
- NorthCentral Montana Regional Water System may provide a source of water to address current shortages but this is a long-term solution that will be built in phases over the next 10 to 20 years.
- Most wastewater treatment systems have adequate capacity but several have water quality issues.
- Triangle Telephone has deployed fiber-to-the-home projects in towns throughout Chouteau County and Chouteau County has a significantly higher rate of fiber to the home service than both the State and rest of the country. .
- Chouteau County has the potential for wind-farm developments.

1. TRANSPORTATION

1. City Streets

The incorporated municipalities maintain local streets within their City limits. The primary sources of funding for on-going maintenance are the general operating funds and motor fuel tax funds. Major improvement projects may be eligible for funding from the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). The major arterial streets in the city limits are generally state or county highways while residential streets are local city streets.

Table 1: Selected Statistics on City Streets

	Fort Benton	Big Sandy	Geraldine
Miles of Streets	16.3	N/A	7.6
Paved Surface	12.9	N/A	N/A

Source: Compiled from Interviews with the Towns

2. County Roads

Most of the paved roads in the County are part of the State primary or secondary highway systems. The secondary highways were under the jurisdiction of the County Road Department until 2000 and then the State took over maintenance of these roads. The remaining roads in the County are mostly gravel and maintained by three Chouteau County Road Districts. The District shops are located in Big Sandy, Fort Benton, and Geraldine with subshops in Highwood, Loma, and Carter.

The primary source of funding for County road improvements is the County's general fund. The Federal Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program allows some funds to be used for local roads while the State Construction Fund, from state gas tax dollars, are for projects not eligible for Federal aid.

The County Road and Bridge department is responsible for maintaining public roads and bridges in the unincorporated area that are not part of the state highway system. Private roads in residential developments that have not been improved to County standards and have not been dedicated as public right-of-way are the responsibility of the private landowner.

Table 2: Selected Statistics on County Roads & Bridges

	District 1	District 2	District 3
Miles of Road	745	850	772
# of Bridges	1	5	11

Source: Chouteau County Road Districts (2003)

3. State & Federal Highways

"Secondary" highways and are maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). The State and Federal Highway system is comprised of the National Highway System, Primary Highway System and the Secondary Highway system. Federal funding for the U.S. and State Highways come from the National Highway System Program and the Surface Transportation Program.

There are no Interstate highways that traverse Chouteau County. The nearest Interstate is I-15, a north-south corridor that can be accessed in Great Falls. U.S. Highway 87 runs directly by Fort Benton and is part of the National Highway System. There are three exits off of the highway into Fort Benton. These include FAS 386 on the South, FAS 387 on the north leading to the airport and MT 80 in the center of these two exits.

Montana Route 80 is a primary highway that extends southeast of Fort Benton to Stanford, MT. Secondary Highways include S-228 that goes south from Fort Benton to Highwood and S-223 going north of Fort Benton to Chester. In the 1999 Legislative Session, all secondary highways that were under County jurisdiction, were transferred to State jurisdiction.

The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) prepares a three-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) that allocates funding for road improvements. Chouteau County is in District 3 - Great Falls. In the 2016-2020 STIP, no major projects are listed. .

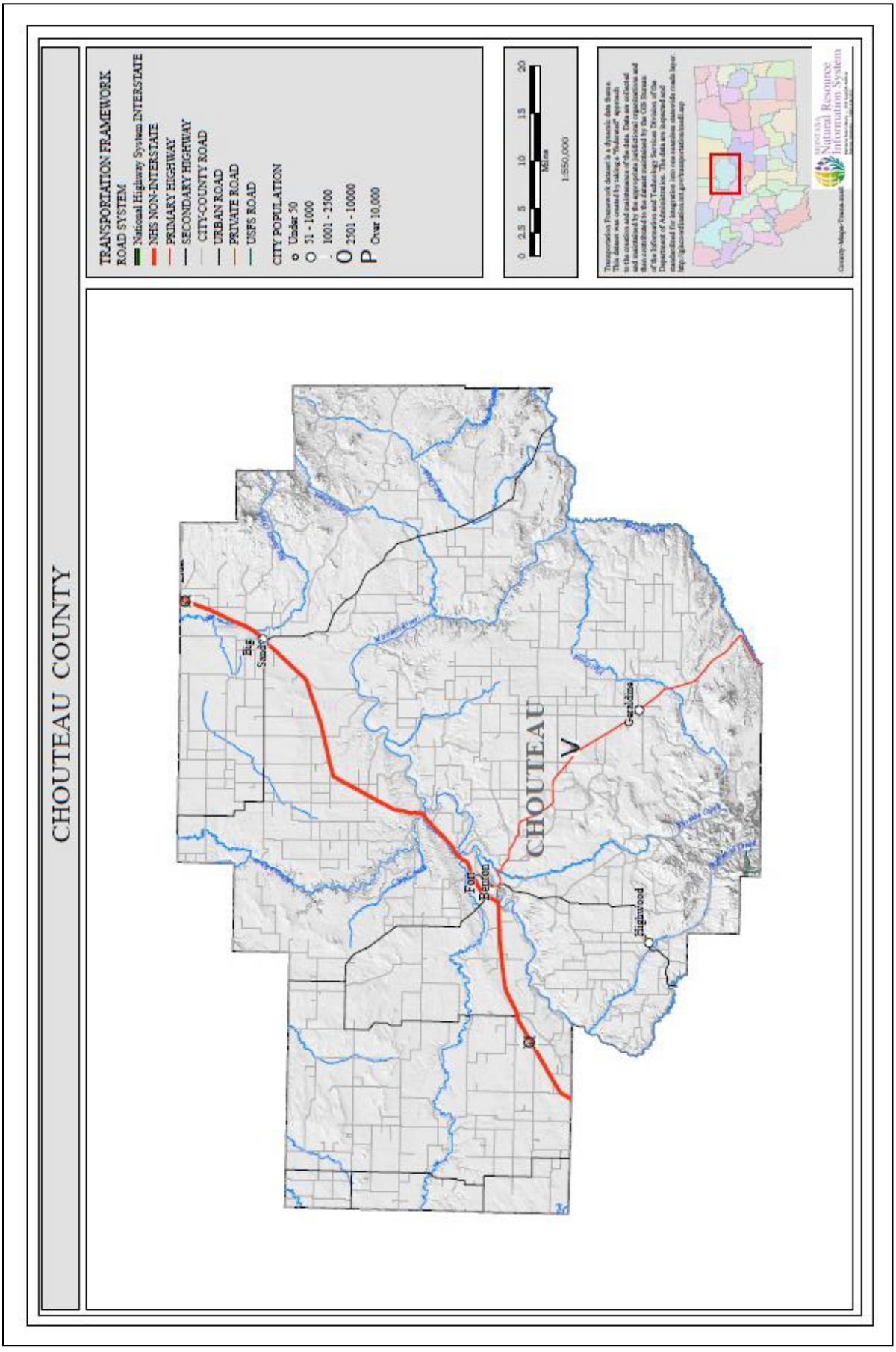
Table 3 indicates Average Daily Traffic for selected highway segments in Chouteau County. The most heavily traveled segment is between the Chouteau-Cascade County line and Fort Benton. The lowest traffic volumes were on MT 564 west of Carter. Traffic increased on most segments of the road system since 2008. ADT on Highways 564 and 228 experienced the only decline.

Table 3: ADT For Segments Chouteau County

Segment	**2008**	**2015**
US Highway 87 (Carter)	2220	2720
US Highway 87 (Fort Benton)	1930	2110
US Highway 87 (Loma)	1500	1750
US Highway 87 (Big Sandy)	1550	1720
US Highway 87 (Box Elder)	1620	2018
MT Highway 80 (Geraldine)	310	790
MT Highway 236 (east of Big Sandy)	240	260
MT Highway 432 (west of Big Sandy)	130	230
MT Highway 223 (Fort Benton to Liberty County)	520	650
MT Highway 564 (Carter Junction)	170	130
MT Highway 228 (Highwood)	390	280

Source: Montana Department of Transportation, "Statewide Traffic County Map", http://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/datastats/statewide_traffic.shtml

Figure 1: Chouteau County – Major Roads



4. Safety

According to data from the Montana Department of Transportation, the number of traffic crashes in Chouteau County were at their lowest level in ten years for the year 2013.

Table 4: Crash Data for Chouteau County

Crash Severity	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Fatal	1	0	1	3	1	0	3	1	0	1
Serious Injury	6	5	8	6	5	5	2	8	5	4
Property Damage Only	82	90	93	77	81	75	85	57	58	48
Yearly Total	104	112	121	108	113	109	116	94	84	78

Source: http://www.mdt.mt.gov/publications/datastats/crashdata.shtml

The Montana Department of Transportation "Vision Zero" initiative has a goal to reduce injury and deaths on Montana Highways through education, engineering, enforcement and emergency response. Additionally, the Safe Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: (SAFETEA-LU) has an increased focus on highway safety. The law established new resources and opportunities to advance highway safety in a comprehensive, strategic way. SAFETEA-LU requires each state to develop a Strategic Highway Safety Plan that provides state and local transportation and safety agencies a life-saving blueprint to address their top safety issues. Montana's Comprehensive Highway Safety Plan (CHSP) meets this requirement.

MDT has developed a program to provide technical and financial assistance to communities for the development of a transportation safety plan that addresses the safety issues specific to their communities. The development of a Community Transportation Safety Plan is a community-led planning effort that brings together local safety partners to work together to address their safety issues. The planning process includes analysis of crash data to identify safety issues and review of best practices strategies to find solutions. The overall goal of the program is to reduce the number and severity of serious and fatal crashes within our communities for both vehicular traffic and pedestrians.

5. Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

The Montana Department of Transportation notes the following regarding multi-modal pedestrian and bicycle facilities:

> "Multimodal transportation systems provide users with a variety of modal options, which is particularly relevant for those who are unable to drive, would prefer not to drive, or cannot afford the costs associated with automobile ownership. In urban locations, multimodal transportation systems help to reduce the stress often caused on roadways by over-reliance on private vehicular access. Non-vehicular transportation is also increasingly promoted as a means for engaging in physical activity, in response to the rising rate of obesity and obesity-related diseases such as diabetes.
>
> Continuous networks of sidewalks, bicycle facilities, and trails are essential components of a multimodal transportation system. Sidewalks that tend to be the most inviting are ones that are buffered from vehicular traffic (by parked cars, trees, or lateral distance), wide enough to

> accommodate all users (usually 8' width in commercial areas is recommended), and that provide direct access to building entrances. Bicycle lanes or paved shoulders are necessary on high volume or high speed roads where it is uncomfortable and unsafe for bicyclists to ride in the lane with vehicular traffic. Bicycle lanes should have a minimum width of 5 feet. Paved shoulders should have a minimum width of 4 feet to accommodate bicyclists, however where 4 feet cannot be achieved, any additional shoulder is better than none at all. Multi-use trails should be at least 10' wide and are safest when at-grade crossings with streets and driveways can be minimized.
>
> Sidewalks should be supported by curb ramps at intersections and driveways, and crosswalks and pedestrian signals at intersections, as required by federal ADA guidelines. In addition to bike lanes, bike racks or lockers encourage bicycle activity because of the safety of storing bikes. Bike racks on buses and other transit facilities for bicyclist encourage the use of bicycle transportation for longer trips. For roads that do not have enough extra-width for a bike lane, wide outside lanes and "Share the road" signs give bicyclists room on the side of a road and alert drivers to the possible presence of cyclists.
>
> In rural areas, multi-use paths provide pedestrians and bicyclists with a safe place to travel, instead of alongside a high-speed curvy road with poor sight distance. Pedestrian trails in lower density areas can enhance the quality of life and provide recreational space for joggers and dog-walkers." *(Source: http://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/toolkit/m1/pptools/ds/pbf.shtml)*

There is a paved walking trail in Fort Benton along the River Front that includes a walking bridge across the Missouri River. In 2016, Highwood completed the "Highwood Bike-n-Walk Trail".

The State of Montana has a number of programs to fund development of trails including the Transportation Alternatives Program administered by the Montana Department of Transportation and the Recreational Trails Program administered by Montana State Parks.

6. Aviation

There are three airports in Chouteau County located in each of the three municipalities of Big Sandy, Fort Benton, and Geraldine. The municipalities own the land and an Airport Board, appointed by the County and cities, oversees operations at the airports. All airports are for general aviation with no commercial passenger service. The nearest commercial passenger service is 30 miles south of the County in Great Falls.

In an effort to assist public use airports with federal compliance regulations, the Montana Department of Transportation - Aeronautics Division routinely uses FAA funds to create Montana State Aviation System Plans (SASPs). These plans commonly include airport capital improvement plans and pavement condition reports. In addition, the Aeronautics Division creates SASPs that report on forecast trends, airport engineering dimensional studies, and economic impacts. The most recent statewide plan was completed in 2015. It included an inventory of airport facilities and recommended improvements. A summary of the inventory for the three airports in Chouteau County is included in the following table.

Table 5: Airport Facilities in Chouteau County

	Fort Benton	Big Sandy	Geraldine
Classification	General Aviation Level 1	General Aviation Level 3	General Aviation Level 4
Runway	4,300' x 75'	3,570 x 60'	2,900' x 75
Runway Pavement	Asphalt	Asphalt	Asphalt
Lighting	Medium Intensity Runway Lights	Medium Intensity Runway Lights	None
Navigation	Lighted Windsock Beacon AWOS	Lighted Windsock Beacon	None
Services	Fixed Based – Full-Time Operator 24-7 Fuel Courtesy Car	24-7 Fuel Courtesy	No Services
Total Annual Operations	5,450	5,350	3,800
Based Aircraft	25	25	0
Airport Plans	Airport Layout Plan	Airport Layout Plan& Master Plan	Airport Layout Plan& Master Plan
Capital Improvements – Upgrades	Taxiway – $2.1 Million Fuel Upgrade - $150,000 Courtesy Car - $5,000	None Identified	None Identified

Source: Montana State Aviation Systems Plan – Inventory, http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/External/Aero/AviationSysPlan/2015/2015-SASP-Inventory-and-Forecasting-Report.pdf

Notes:

1. *Level 1 Airport – maintains a consistent and contributing role in enabling the local, regional, and state-wide economy to have access to and from the national and global economy.*
   Level 2 Airport – maintains a contributing role in supporting the local and regional economies and connecting the community to the state and national economies.
   Level 3 Airport – maintains a supplemental contributing role for the local economy and community access.
   Level 4 Airport – maintains a limited contributing role for the local economy and community access.

2. *AWOS = Automated Weather Observing Station*

7. Transit

There are two transit agencies providing limited services within Chouteau County. North Central Montana Transit is based in Havre and provides services from Havre to Great Falls. The transit service does not stop in Chouteau County but does stop in Box Elder just north of the County line. Liberty County Transit provides rides on request from Chester to Big Sandy or Great Falls.

Figure 2 : Transit Systems in North Central Montana

Source: Opportunity Link, http://www.opportunitylinkmt.net/

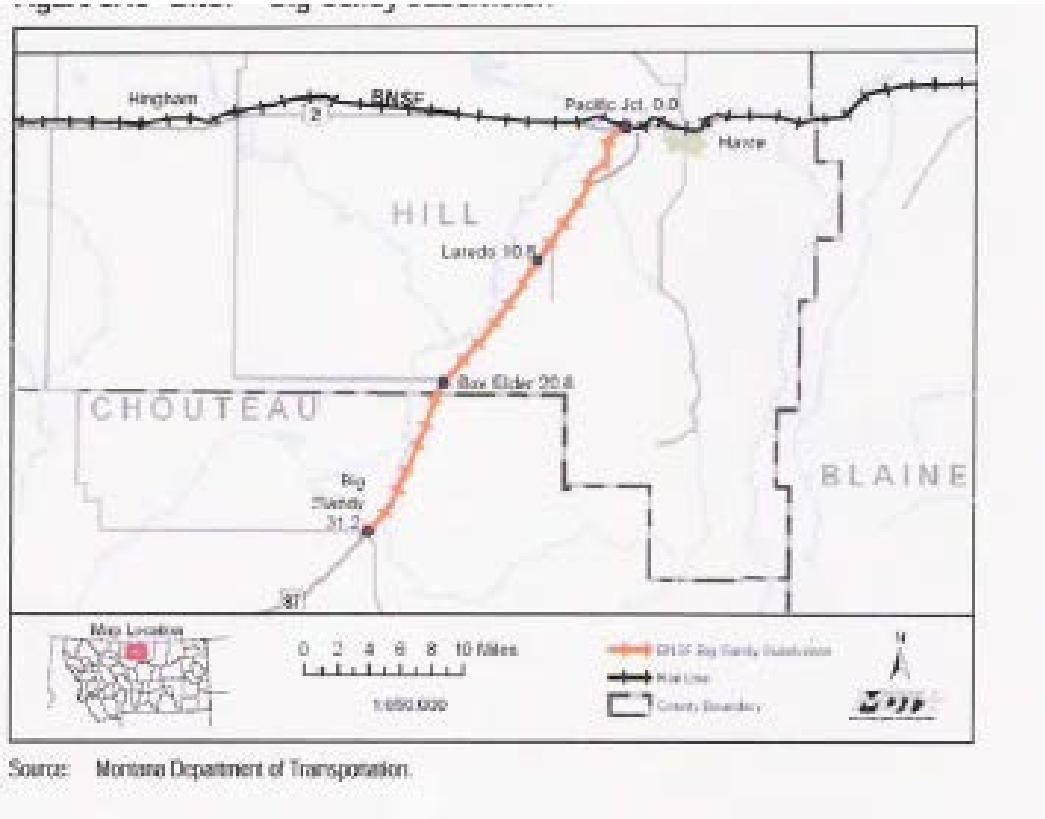
8. Rail

There is no passenger rail service in Chouteau County. The nearest passenger train service is Amtrak in Havre. The Burlington Northern/Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) maintains two rail lines in the County while Central Montana Railroad (CMR) operates a line in the southwest part of the County. The "2009 Montana Rail Plan Update" (Prepared by Cambridge Systematics, INC.) notes that all of these lines have been identified as having low-traffic density as measured by carloads per mile and are “at-risk” lines for abandonment. The Following is a description of these facilities from the Plan.

- BNSF- Havre to Big Sandy Branch Line

“The Big Sandy Subdivision begins at MP 0.0 in pacific Junction and extends to the MP 31.2 in Big Sandy. Additional stations along this branch line include Laredo (MP 10.8) and Box Elder (MP 20.8). This line services and ADM/CHS grain facility in Big Sandy and converges with the HI-Line and Milk River main lines at Pacific Junction. The line operates under TWC with a 10 MPH maximum speed. Maximum gross car weight is restricted to 143 tons along the subdivision’s 31.2 miles. “

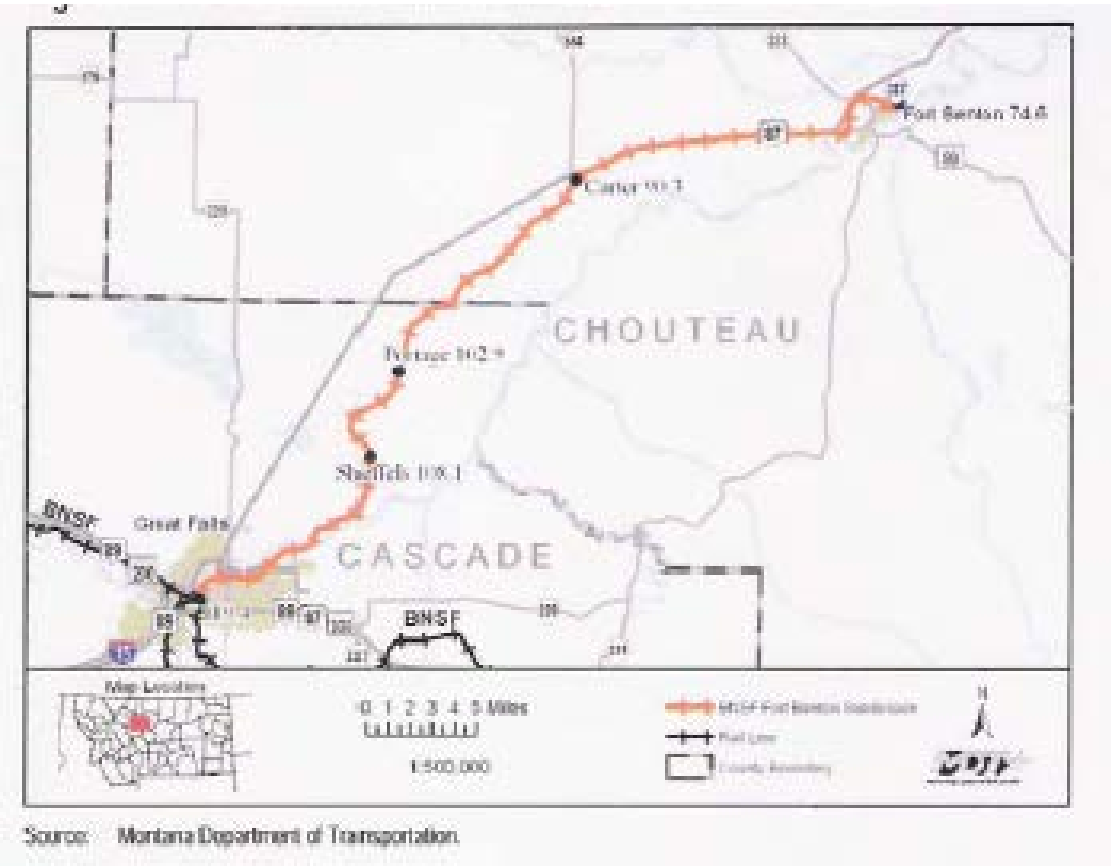
Figure 3: BNSF Line – Havre to Big Sandy



- Great Falls-Fort Benton Branch Line

"The Fort Benton Subdivision, shown in Figure 3 is a 45-mile branch line that runs from Fort Benton (MP 74.6) to Great Falls (MP 119.4). The line converges with both the Laurel and Great Falls main lines in the City of Great Falls (Subdivions N and F, respectively). Other stations along the route include: Carter (MP 90.3), Portage (MP102.0), and Sheffels (MP 108.1). Serving two grain elevator facilities, one in Carter and one in Fort Benton, the line has a maximum gross car weight limit of 143 tons. While the maximum speed is listed as 25 mph along the full length of the line, permanent speed restrictions limit speeds to 10 mph along several short segments of 1 mile or less. The Fort Benton line operates under TWC.

Figure 4: Great Falls – Fort Benton BNSF Rail Line



Note:

TWC = Track Warrant Control. Used on unsignalized systems, a tract warrant provides permission to occupy main track between two specific points, typically defined by stations and mileposts. Dispatchers typically issue track warrants verbally by radio.

- Central Montana Rail, Inc. (CMR)

"Central Montana Rail, Inc. (CMR), shown in Figure 4, is a Class III local railroad which operates 87 route miles between Moccasin Junction (MP0.0) and Geraldine (MP 135.2). It also includes 9.2 miles of switching tracks for an overall total of 96.2 miles. There are 11 total stations along the line, including Kingston Junction (MP 20.0 and MP 71.7) and Denton (MP 95.2). The maximum authorized speed is 25 mph, with restrictions in select areas to 10 mph. The line connects with the BNSF Laurel main line (Subdivision O) at Moccasin."

Figure 5: Central Montana Rail Line

2. COMMUNITY WATER FACILITIES

1. Town of Fort Benton

- *Water Supply & Storage*

Fort Benton's existing water supply is obtained via a Ranney infiltration gallery which was constructed in 1985-1986. The infiltration gallery is located adjacent to the northwest side of the Missouri River just upstream of the Geraldine Bridge. The infiltration gallery collects water from the Missouri river through a series of six lateral collecting pipes draining into a large caisson. Two large turbine pumps then convey the water through UV disinfection units, after which the water is chlorinated before entering into the distribution system. The collector was designed to provide a maximum daily flow of 3 million gallons in the summer months.

Water storage for the City of Fort Benton consists of three separate water storage tanks which provide a total storage volume of 1.17 million gallons. Water Storage Tank #1, with a total usable volume of 279,662 gallons, is located northwest of Fort Benton on 12th Street. Water Storage Tank #2 is located northwest of Fort Benton on 16th Street and has a total usable volume of 405,859 gallons. Water Storage Tank #3, located northeast of Fort Benton on Main Street, has a total useable volume of 488,534 gallons.

- *Water Distribution System*

Fort Benton's water distribution system consists of over 80,000 lineal feet of mains and laterals that transport water to individual service lines. The system is comprised primarily of 4-inch, 6-inch and 8-inch mains (PVC, ductile iron and asbestos cement) along with numerous gate valves and fire hydrants. The 2009 Draft PER identifies three phases of needed distribution improvements. Phase 1 improvements, estimated to cost $607,000, coincide with a project currently scheduled for construction during the fall of 2009. The other two phases discussed are preliminary in nature and inclusion in this CIP would be premature.

- Water Fill Station

The City currently provides a pay operated water filling station. This station is not in compliance with DEQ regulations, requiring a properly installed backflow preventer among other things. The City is moving forward with a design to address the deficiencies.

- *Usage*

The well is rated for 3 million gallons per day, but currently produces 1.5 million gallons/day. This has the capacity to support a domestic population of approximately 7,000 people. The current average daily consumption is 300,000 gallons/day in winter and 1.2 million gallons/day in summer.

- *Upgrades*

- Phase1 Distribution System Improvements.
- Make necessary improvements to the water fill station to bring into Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) compliance.
- Incorporate the recommendations of the Final 2009 Water System Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) into the Capital Improvement Plan (CI))
- Coordinate water main replacement with sewer and street improvements.

2. Big Sandy

- Water Supply and Storage

Currently, Big Sandy has four wells but only three of those are working. In 2002-2003, the Town has drilled 5 holes looking for new sources of water but all of these were dry. The aquifer level is going down and the existing wells are at risk of drying up. Even though there is high ground water, the soils are such that they do not result in a producible well. The City is part of the North Central Montana Regional Water System and eventually this could be an additional source of water but it will not address short-term concerns. The Town has water rationing on lawn watering. Water storage is a 500,000 gallon tank north of town and is in good condition.

- Water Quality

The Town chlorinates and adds blended phosphate to treat water. The Town recently completed the construction of a new chlorination building.

- Distribution System

The distribution was updated in 1986. Fittings are being replaced on an ongoing basis. There are several cast iron lines remaining in the system that need to be replaced.

- Usage & Rates

The town has approximately 350 water users. They do sell potable water to ranchers for cisterns. The base water rate is $20.75 per month for both residential and commercial users with an additional charge of $0.85 for every 1,000 gallons of water usage beyond 4,000 gallons.

- Upgrades

The Town recently received a planning grant from Montana's Treasure State Endowment Program (TSEP) to prepare a preliminary engineering report (PER) for the development of an interim water supply. The first option would be to drill deeper wells. The cost to drill three wells, to replace the loss in the well production or approximately 100 gallons per minute would have been over $270,000 plus another $125,000 for engineering and connection costs. Another alternative is to work with the North Central Montana Regional Water Authority to get services provide an interim solution. The Rocky Boy Reservation has constructed a Reverse Osmosis (RO) Plant by the casino that could provide water to Big Sandy. If the Water Authority selects Big Sandy as a project in FY 2009, The Town could potentially be receiving supplemental water in 2010.

3. Town of Geraldine

- *Water Supply & Storage*

The water source is spring fed from Square Butte. It is part of the Eagle-Sandstone Aquifer. In the past if there was a drought the water supply was supplemented with water from an artesian well. The well is not currently in use. An 80,000 gallon tank built in 1961 provides storage and has some stress cracks.

- *Distribution System*

There is a 9.6 mile main line from the spring on Square Butte to town that was installed new in 1985. In-town water lines were installed in 1961 with a life expectancy of 80 years. There are 45 miles of water lines to serve rural customers in the Harweden, Square Butte, and North Geraldine water districts.

- *Usage*

There are 192 metered customers in town. There are 42 rural customers. The contract with rural customers was renegotiated in 2004. No new rural hook-ups are being added to the system.

- *Upgrades*

The town is built a new 200,000 gallon storage tank in 2005.

4. North Central Montana Regional Water System

The North Central Montana Regional Water System is a project that will secure a future water supply for several water systems within Chouteau County. A description of the project follows:

> "The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation and the State of Montana, through the Reserved Water Rights Commission, negotiated a settlement of the Tribe's Water Rights Claims. The Compact, ratified by the 1997 Montana Legislature and signed by President Clinton in December of 1999, provided a water allocation of 10,000 acre feet to the Tribe from Lake Elwell (Tiber Reservoir), south of Chester, Montana. In addition to providing a **water supply** for the Tribe, the project was also expanded to provide water service to residents of Chouteau, Hill, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, Glacier and Toole counties in Montana.
>
> The system is comprised of Core and non-Core Systems. The Core System consists of an intake structure, treatment plant, transmission pipeline, pumping and storage facilities to provide water from Lake Elwell to the residents of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, and on-reservation infrastructure. The Core System is represented by the Chippewa Cree Construction Corporation (CCCC).
>
> The Non-Core System consists of the pipelines and storage and pumping facilities to deliver water from the Core System to the Participating Systems, including communities, rural water districts, Hutterite colonies, and other rural users in seven counties of north central Montana. The Non-Core System is represented by the North Central Montana Regional Water Authority (NCMRWA). The system includes the Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation in the Core System and 22 participating water systems in the Non-Core System including:
>
> Town of Big Sandy, City of Cut Bank, City of Havre, Town of Dutton, City of Shelby, Town of Sunburst, Town of Kevin, City of Conrad, Town of Chester, Brady County Water District, North Havre County Water District, Sweetgrass County Water District, Hill County Water District, Loma County Water District, Oilmont County Water District, Sage Creek County Water District, South Chester County Water District, Tiber County Water District, Devon Water, Inc., Galata County Water District, Riverview Colony and Eagle Creek Colony. (Source: http://www.rockyboynorthcentral.com/)

5. Carter

- Water Supply & Storage

The water is supplied from an infiltration gallery located next to the Missouri River, approximately four miles to the east of the Town of Carter. The system consists of more than 38 miles of 2,3,4 and 6 inch PVC water pipe. Four booster stations help supply sufficient pressure throughout the water district. The drinking water is not continuously treated at this time; however, the operator periodically chlorinates the storage tanks using solid chlorine tablets.

- Distribution System

In addition to the water main to the river, there are lines that distribute water to Floweree and north of Carter Road. There are about 50 miles of water lines to both towns and the farms on the system. Due to age of the lines there is leakage, broken lines and water consumption is higher than what would be expected.

- Usage - There are 77 service connections on the system.

- Upgrades - A Source Water Assessment has been completed for Carter with management recommendations. Upgrades to the distribution system since 2010 include:
    - Installed a filtration system
    - Two new pumps in one of the pump houses
    - Three miles of new line of pump house #3
    - Wireless communication system between pump house #3 and pump house #4

6. Tiber County Water District

Tiber County Water District provides service to rural customers in the westernmost part of the County. The source of the water is Lake Elwell. The District provides service in Teton, Chouteau, and Pondera Counties. Water from Tiber Reservoir is pumped into a large concrete tower intake with two inlets in the tower and one extending out into the reservoir. The treatment plant is located approximately four miles south of the intake. Water from the reservoir undergoes treatment before it is distributed. The Tiber County Water District has a direct filtration plant designed to produce 1.728-million gallons per day (MGD); however, peak use of the system would likely be 0.5-MGD with an average usage of 0.25-MGD. Two pressure filters provide filtration. Disinfection is provided by gas chlorination.

The distribution system consists of approximately 680 miles of steel and PVC pipe ranging from 1-inch to 9-inch in diameter. In addition, each customer is required to have a cistern with a 500-gallon minimum capacity in the event of a main break. The Tiber County Water District has nine booster stations (#in order to maintain a residual in the far ends of the system. The District could provide service to new development but the cost of the line would be assessed to the developer. The District is part of the North Central Montana Regional Water System consortium.

7. Highwood

- Water Supply & Storage

Highwood has four wells that are all functional. There is an above ground steel 200,000 gallon steel tank that was constructed in 2000.

- Water Quality - The water system in compliance with environmental standards.
- Distribution System

The distribution system was upgraded in 2000 to replace existing lines. The new lines provide additional capacity.

- Usage - There are 87 users on the system.
- Upgrades - On-going maintenance. Sewer lines require upgrades.

8. Loma

- Water Supply & Storage

The Marias River is the water supply for the river. Water is pumped to an above ground storage tank located on a butte north of town. The storage tank is 20 years old and in good condition requiring only on-going maintenance.

- Water Quality

Water is clorinated at the filtration plan. Although the water meets existing water quality standards, new requirements require more expense to treat the water in order to comply with regulations.

- Distribution System

Main lines are in good condition. There is some leakage and breakage with the smaller lines.

- Usage

There are 100-125 users on the system that includes both the town and some rural customers. The system is at capacity and no more users can be added.

- Upgrades

Replace some of the distribution line. The system is part of the North Central Montana Regional Water System consortium.

9. Tri-County Water District

- *Water Supply & Storage*

The District serves parts of Chouteau, Cascade and Teton County. It operates a well on the Fairfield Bench in Teton County and provides service to the southwest portion of Chouteau County. The system was built in 1981 and began operating in 1982. A storage tank provides approximately 192,000 gallons of water storage for the PWS. This provides approximately one to two days of water storage.

- *Water Quality/ Distribution System*

The water is chlorinated and there is no filtering. The distribution system was installed in 1981 and 1982. The District maintains 215 miles of pipeline.

- *Water Usage*

Tri-County Water District serves a population of 460 people located in Teton, Cascade, and Choteau counties. The general area in the district spans from ten miles east of Choteau to approximately ten miles west of Floweree. The system was designed for 175 customers are taxed. The system is at capacity. No new users are being accepted to the District. Users are assessed a monthly fee and can draw up to 1440 gallons per day. The system is exclusively for domestic water and many users rely on cisterns instead of piped water.

- *Upgrades*

In 2009, the District spent approximately $1 million to put in a booster station and three miles of larger pipe in the Power Rd – Bootlegger Trail area. They also drilled a new well for the area. The improvements were to provide a redundant water source for an area of the District that had a marginal supply. It did not increase the capacity. The District also completed a hydrological study in 2009 to respond to request for service. Replacement of the water tank is scheduled to be completed in 2017. The tank will not have increased capacity.

10. South Chouteau County Water District

- Water Supply and Storage - South Chouteau County's water is supplied from one 30-foot well equipped with a 12 HP submersible pump. This well is located 75 feet from Highwood Creek. The system is chlorinate at the water supply full time and pump to storage tanks which feed the distribution system..
- Water Quality - Complies with current water quality standards.
- Distribution - There is 50 miles of Distribution Line.
- Users - There are 29 rural water users in the District.
- Upgrades - On-going maintenance.

11. Private Water Systems

In the planning area above the river corridor, the geology is primarily Colorado shale. According to the Soil Conservation Service, this formation generally translates into small yields of highly mineralized water near the base suitable for livestock needs. It is not considered a good source for groundwater development. Yields range from zero to eight gallons per minute and would not support significant development. Due to the poor water quality, many county residents rely on cisterns. The municipalities and several of the water districts have water stations where rural customers pay to fill cisterns.

In addition to the public water systems, private community systems are regulated by the State and EPA. These systems are divided into three categories and are subject to different levels of compliance and permitting.

1) Community Water Systems are defined as systems that serve the same people year-round (e.g. in homes or businesses).

2) Non-Transient Non-Community Water Systems: Water Systems that serve the same people, but not year-round (e.g. schools that have their own water system).

3) Transient Non-Community Water Systems: Water Systems that do not consistently serve the same people (e.g. rest stops, campgrounds, gas stations).

All water systems must comply with the EPA Safe Water Drinking Act. The act requires increasingly more stringent standards that may create difficulty for compliance with small community water systems. Additionally, the Act requires source protection for community water systems. Communities or districts must prepare well head protection plans and limit certain land use within a specified distance from the well head. A combination of permitting procedures through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and land use regulations are used to enforce these restrictions. Montana Rural Water Systems, a non-profit agency with funding from Rural Development and EPA, provides technical assistance and training to administer these regulations for water systems.

3. WASTE WATER TREATMENT

1. City of Fort Benton

The last major sewer system project took place during the mid 1990's when the Wastewater Treatment System was upgraded to bring it into compliance with MDEQ standards. A detailed PER is planned within the next year to identify deficiencies currently suspected with the system. Appendix B is included for additional information.

- Collection System

The age of the collection system varies dating back to sections in the original townsite that were constructed in the early 1900's. The collection system is currently on an annual rotation for TV inspection/cleaning.

- Lift Station & Force Main

The lift station was built in 1991 and is in need of major upgrades including a new control system and possibly a total replacement of the lift station. The force main to the lagoons is over 40 years old.

- Lagoon System

An upgrade to the aeration components is expected to bring the system into permit compliance. Other improvements such as liner replacement may be required as well. The facility is constructed in an area of shallow groundwater. A small building that houses the monitoring equipment is present at the site.

- Upgrades

- Conduct a Wastewater System Preliminary Engineering Report (PER) that includes the collection system, the lift station, the force main, and the treatment system.
- Incorporate the recommendations of the Final Wastewater System PER, including proposed lift station upgrades, into future CIP updates.
- Continue annual cleaning and inspections of sewer mains.
- Coordinate sewer main replacements with water and street improvements.
- In 2016, the city issued a bid for a project that consists of wastewater system improvements generally including installation of new lift station pumps and controls, an emergency power generator, a new force main, treatment lagoon site piping and control structure improvements, pumping systems, a masonry block treatment building, clarifiers, sludge drying beds, UV and chlorine disinfection systems, an irrigation system and irrigation main to irrigate an existing golf course, golf course irrigation system improvements, and lining an existing pond on the golf course.

2. Big Sandy

- Treatment Plant

The existing treatment facility is located approximately ¼ mile northeast of town. The facility consists of four treatment lagoons, aerators and a chlorination structure. Three cells discharge into Big Sandy Creek while the fourth cell is used during the summer months for storage and subsequent evaporation. The facility has had four permit violations since 1999. Additionally, the plant is not equipped to meet new permit limits for nutrients and the large storage cell may be leaking and contaminating groundwater.

- Collection System

The existing collection system consists of approximately 32,700 linear feet of pipes ranging in size from 6 inches to 12 inches. The Wastewater Facility Plan indicated that the existing lift station is aging and unsafe. Additionally, much of the collection system has inadequate slopes leading to accumulations of sludge, grit and grease. There is significant infiltration of ground water into the existing system. Portions of the town lack sewer facilities.

- Usage & Rates

There are 309 residential and 20 commercial water and sewer hookups in Big Sandy. The base sewer rate is $19.25 per month for both residential and commercial users. The commercial uses are also charged for each 6,000 gallons of water usage beyond an initial 6,000 gallons.

- Upgrades

Big Sandy has received funding from USDA for upgrades to the plan. Phase I, completed in early 2010, addressed the initial waste collection issues. Phase II, opened on Earth Day, April 22nd, 2015, made improvements to the wastewater treatment facility. The lagoons were relined to reinforce containment, the aeration system was updated to assist with odor control, and the ultra-violet disinfection system was upgraded. Also added was another lift station to aid the pump systems when the treated waste is used for spray irrigation on crops. Phase III, will replace the remaining 11,800 linear feet of clay tile sewer mains and install new manhole covers. Big Sandy has not yet set a date for the start of this final phase.

3. Geraldine

- *Treatment Plant/Collection System*

Geraldine has a two cell lagoon system that was constructed in 2001. The first cell is a graduated cell with two levels and wind driven mixers. The treated effluent is discharged into creek that is fed by Winchell Springs in-town. The collection system was installed in 1955 and has a 40 year life expectancy. It is gradually being replaced as need.

- *Upgrades*

The Department of Environmental Quality classifies the stream where the treatment plant discharges as ephemeral (intermittent) for the purpose of meeting water quality standards.

4. Highwood

Highwood has an aerated three-cell lagoon system that discharges to Highwood Creek. There are 87 users on the system. The Treatment plant was constructed in 1998. The collection system is 27 years old. They recently videotaped the system and were able to identify repairs to cut down on infiltration. Maintenance of the system, such as replacing the liner in the lagoons, are on-going.

5. Carter

There is a lagoon system south of town. Sewer lines require routine maintenance. Radon has been detected.

6. Septic Systems

Rural residences in the planning area use individual septic tanks and drainfields for sewage disposal. The Montana Sanitation and Subdivision acts requires the review and approval of proposed water, sewer, solid waste and drainage in all subdivisions and most land divisions that are exempt from local government review. The Act allows local review of land divisions containing five or fewer parcels that will use individual on-site water and sewer facilities or that will connect to an existing public water and sewer system.

In Chouteau County the County Sanitarian handles this function. The County reviews all septic permits for any parcel over 20 acres. Both the County Sanitarian and the Department of Environmental Quality must review any development on less than 20 acres. In Chouteau County there is an average of 10 to 12 permits for new construction each year and a comparable number of replacement permits. There has been little activity in the four-mile planning area.

4. SOLID WASTE

1. Montana Waste

Montana Waste, located in Great Falls, offers collection and disposal services. It operates a Class II landfill in Great Falls and accepts household and commercial waste and accepts construction debris. The landfill has an expected 70-year life span from 1995. The landfill accepts solid waste from ten counties. Montana Waste provides weekly service in Fort Benton and Geraldine. Additionally, they provide service to rural customers as far north as Loma. Rural service is contracted individually and may be weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly service.

2. Fort Benton Landfill

The Fort Benton landfill, located on the north end of town as closed to garbage dumping in 1988. The City owned the land but contracted for its operation. Since it has been closed, the land has been fenced in and closed to the public. There are no plans to reclaim the site for another use.

Fort Benton owns and operates a container site, consisting of two forty-yard containers, that local residents may gain access to by contacting City Hall and paying a tipping fee. The containers are hauled by Montana Waste to their landfill north of Great Falls where the solid waste is properly disposed of. Significant improvements were conducted to the container site in 2008 to satisfy safety requirements.

3. Unified Disposal Landfill

Unified Disposal Landfill is located 3 miles east of Havre at 7055 Road 451 SE and serves Hill, Blaine and Chouteau County (Big Sandy) . It is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm (except holidays.)

Acceptable Disposal Items

- Household Refuse
- Trees, Lumber, Shrubs must be cut to a length of 4 or less
- Small Quantities of Treated Grain
- EMPTY Chemical Barrels must be triple rinsed
- White ware Washers and Dryers, Fridges and Freezers without Freon
- Tires

4. Recycling

The Fort Benton Recycles volunteer group formed in 2013, and in the past three years the work done by the group has kept more than 90 tons of reusable materials out of the landfills. Recyclables collections are held the first Saturday of each month at the Dedman Foundation from 10 a.m. to noon.

ELECTRICITY & GAS

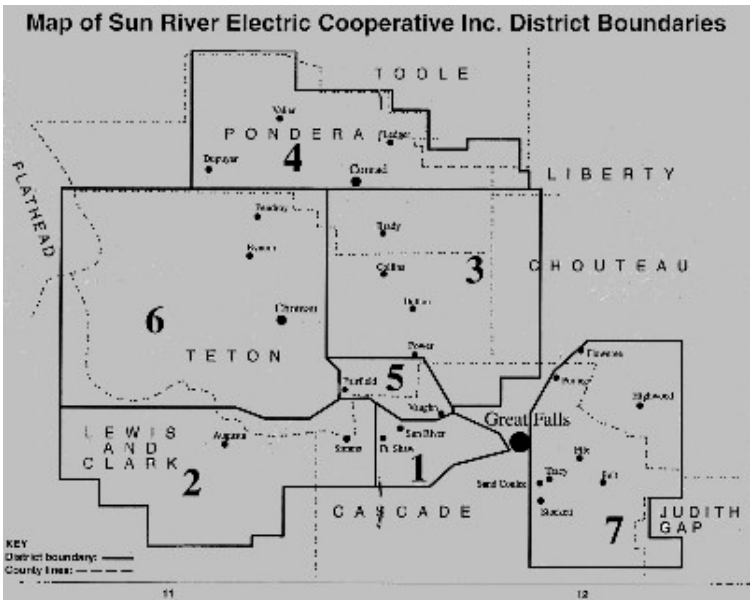
1. Northwest Energy

Northwest Energy is the electric and natural gas utility that serves the incorporated towns. The Northwest energy service territory covers approximately 107,600 square miles or 73% of Montana. This area includes 288,000 electric customers and 151,000 natural gas customers in the western two-thirds of Montana. Northwest Energy electric transmission system consists of over 7,000 miles of transmission lines and associated terminal facilities. The Northwest Energy system has interconnections to five major transmission systems located in the Western Systems Coordinating Council (WSCC) area, as well as one interconnection to a system that connects with the Mid-Continent Area Power Pool (MAPP) region.

2. Sun River Electric

Sun River Electric Cooperative was first organized as Sun River Electrification in 1937. It opened its headquarters in Fairfield the following year and still operates at that location. The first electric service was installed in the Sun River Valley from Vaughn to Simms and north to the Fairfield Bench. Today Sun River Electric serves consumers in Cascade, Teton, Pondera, Lewis & Clark, Chouteau, Liberty, Toole, and Judith Basin counties. The Cooperative purchases power from Central Montana Generation and Transmission Company. This Company, located in Great Falls, buys power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). For new subdivisions in the County, the developer must pay for extending electric service to the development.
(http://www.sunriverec.com/)

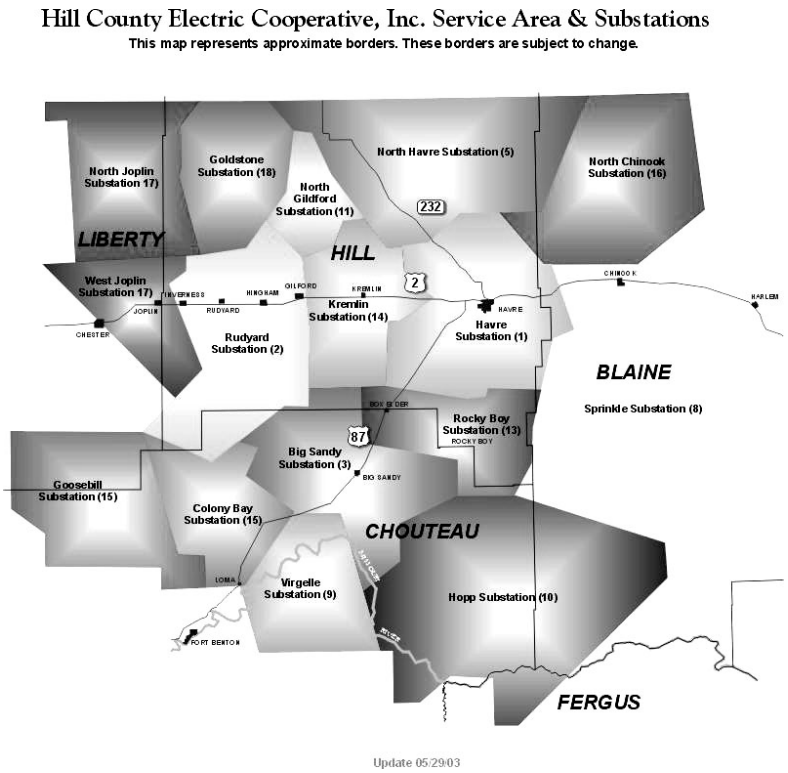
Figure 6: Map of Sun River Electric Cooperative Inc. District Boundaries



3. Hill County

Hill County Electric Cooperative, Inc. is a member owned electric cooperative providing service to Blaine, Chouteau, Fergus, Hill and Liberty counties. Currently Hill County Electric Cooperative provides electric service to approximately 2,200 members and 3,342 meters over 3,349 miles of line. (http://hcelectric.com/)

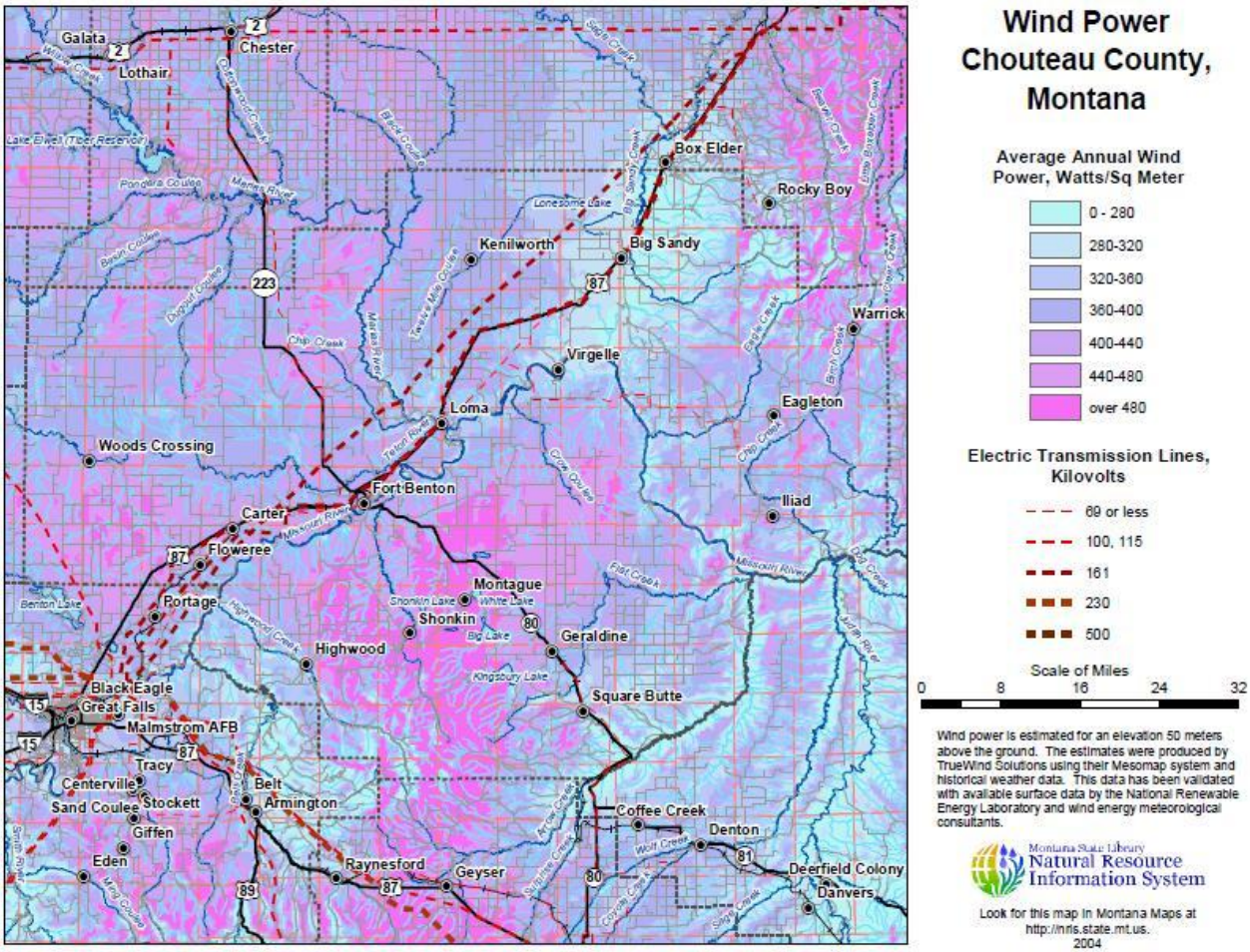
Figure 7: Hill County Electric Cooperative Service Area



4. Wind Power

Montana currently has about 375 mega-watt capacity of commercial wind installed. The Judith Gap installation was the first industrial-scale farm at about 135 MW. The Glacier Wind Farm in north-central Montana has recently added about 200 MW and several major projects are under active development with capacity of about 500 mega-watts expected by the end of 2011. Regionally, the Northwest Wind Integration Action Plan predicts 6,000 MW of wind energy by 2024, or even sooner given the recent pace of construction. (Source: http://deq.mt.gov/Energy/Renewable/WindWeb/default.mcpx). Given these trends, it is likely that there will be interest in developing wind projects in the county. The following map indicates the transmission system and wind speeds for the county.

Figure 8: Wind Resources Map – Chouteau County



6. TELECOMMUNICATIONS

1. Telephone

There are several local exchange carriers providing service in Chouteau County. Central Montana Communications (CMC) and Triangle Telephone are part of the same parent company that is headquartered in Havre, MT. Three Rivers Telephone Cooperative has headquarters in Fairfield, MT.

- Three Rivers Telephone Cooperative - Central Offices in Carter & Highwood
- Central Montana Communications - Central Office in Fort Benton, Geraldine
- Triangle Telephone Cooperative - Central Offices in Loma, Big Sandy, Box Elder, and Hopp-Illiad.

All three companies are part of the Montana Advanced Information Network (MAIN). MAIN was formed in 1995 to construct a statewide fiber network. All of the CMC and Triangle Telephone exchanges have DSL service.

Cellular service in Chouteau County is provided by Verizon, AT&T and Cellular One.

2. Cable Television

Three local channels from Great Falls may be obtained from a receiver station located in Fort Benton. Charter Cable provides cable service to Fort Benton, offering over 30 expanded basic channels and four premium channels. There are no public/education/government (PEG) channels. Cable operators receive programs from satellite and broadcasts signals and re-transmit these signals through coaxial and/or fiber optic to customer's homes.

3. Video Conferencing

- Vision Net

In 1995, five telephone cooperatives formed a collective to build an interactive video network that would link schools and colleges in the rural regions of the state. VisionNet is headquartered in Great Falls and is comprised of a fiber optic backbone with eight hubs located statewide. The fiber ring topology allows traffic to be routed in case of a service outage on the network. There are three separate connections to the Internet backbone. Vision Net studios in the study area include Fort Benton, and Box Elder.

- REACH Montana Telemedicine Network

The Reach network is operated by Benefis Hospital in Great Falls and includes video-conferencing facilities for telemedicine. Sites in Chouteau County are at the hospitals in Fort Benton and Big Sandy.

4. Internet

In 2010, when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) adopted the National Broadband Plan, the definition of broadband was 4mbps download speed. In the FCC "2015 -Broadband Progress Report", the FCC adopted a new standard for broadband of 25mbps download speed. The FCC Broadband Plan calls for 100 mbps download speeds for homes and one gigabit speeds for anchor institutions by the year 2020. While download speeds are important for popular applications such as streaming video, businesses and telecommuters that are transferring large data files often have a need for higher upload speeds as well. According to Table 10, Chouteau County has a significantly higher rate of fiber to the home service than both the State and rest of the country. Fiber Speeds contribute to much higher upload/download speeds being available to residents in the county.

Table 6: % of population in service area with selected broadband services

	Chouteau County		**State**		**National**	
Type of Technology						
DSL	24.3%		85.0%		90.0%	
Fiber	68.4%		3.4%		25.4%	
Cable	2.8%		68.3%		88.8%	
Wireless	89.8%		96.6%		99.4%	
	Download	Upload	Download	Upload	Download	Upload
Wireline Speed						
>3mpbs	86.4%	77.3%	86.8%	17.7%	95.4%	86.0%
>10 mbps	77.3%	70.2%	78.9%	9.7%	92.9%	62.1%
>25 mbps	77.3%	61.3%	22.5%	1.6%	85.3%	27.5%
>100 mbps	61.3%	61.3%	1.6%	0.3%	64.8%	18.3%
Wireless Speed						
>3mpbs	80.3%	80.3%	95.1%	91.4%	99.3%	99.3%
>10 mbps	68.0%	67.9%	93.1%	0%	98.2%	16.6%

Source: National Broadband Map – 2014, http://www.broadbandmap.gov/summarize

LOCAL SERVICES

OVERVIEW

- Taxable value of land in the County has increased slightly over the last five years, except in Big Sandy where there was a slight decline in taxable value. The State has just undertakes a reassessment process every six years.
- There are three incorporated municipalities in the County that include the county seat of Fort Benton and the Towns of Big Sandy and Town of Geraldine. Part of the Rocky Boy's Reservation is located within Chouteau County.
- Fire protection is provided by eight volunteer fire departments. Emergency services are coordinated by the County Department of Emergency Services. The County adopted a Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2005.
- The "Community Wildfire Protection Plan" was completed in 2007 and identifies areas of the wildland-urban interface in the timbered areas near the Bear Paw and Highwood Mountains as well as communities that are at risk due to grass fires.
- Chouteau County Sheriff's Department provides law enforcement for the unincorporated areas of the county as well as Big Sandy and Geraldine. The overall crime rate in the County is among the lowest the State.
- The County library system exceeds average service standards for libraries of comparable size around the state.
- Overall school enrollments declined in the County over the last 10-years. The declines occurred in Fort Benton and Big Sandy while Geraldine and Highwood experienced a slight increase in enrollment.
- The County is served by medical centers in Fort Benton and Big Sandy. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services has identified a shortage of dental health and mental health professionals county wide There is a shortage of primary care professionals in Big Sandy and Geraldine and lack of access to primary care for low-income populations in Fort Benton.
- A number of agencies provide social services in the county.

1. County Government

The Montana Territorial Legislature established Chouteau County in 1865 and named it after Pierre Chouteau of the American Fur Company. Chouteau County has three elected commissioners, with a chairman selected by the commissioners. Each of the three elected commissioners represents a specific road district. According to data from the Montana State University Local Government Center, in 2014, there were 76 employees on the County's payroll comprised of the following:

- Elected - 9
- Full-Time – 48
- Part-Time – 15
- Seasonal – 4
- Total - 76

Most county offices are located in the Courthouse at 1308 Franklin or at the County Law Enforcement Center directly south of the courthouse at 1215 Washington. The county also has offices at 1020 13th Street. The County operates the library in Fort Benton and branches in Big Sandy and Geraldine. Following is a list of departments, agencies and offices operated by the County.

- Board of County Commissioners
- Assessor & Appraiser
- County Attorney
- Clerk & Recorder
- Dept. of Emergency Services
- Chouteau County Extension Office
- Mental Health Services
- Sheriff & Coroner
- Superintendent of Schools
- Clerk of District Court
- Treasurer
- Dept. of Children and Family Services
- Planning
- Public Health
- Justice of the Peace
- Office of Public Assistance

2. County Finances

The primary source of tax revenue for local governments is property taxes. Chouteau County collects taxes for the various local governments according to the levies that local governing bodies establish annually. Mill levies and per capita spending are generally a function of property assessments and population. Counties with small populations may have a higher per capita spending while counties with higher land values have lower mill levies. In Chouteau County, Geraldine and Fort Benton, taxable valuation increased over the last four years. Growth in taxable value varies widely from county to county and generally reflects trends in new residential and commercial development. The Montana Department of Revenue reappraises property on a six-year cycle with reappraisals occurring in 2015. In addition to the city and county levies, there are the school levies, municipal levies and levies for other government functions. School levies account for the largest portion of the property taxes collected.

Table 1: Taxable Valuation and General Fund Levy-2014

Fiscal Year	Taxable Value (1,000s)	% Change	Total Mills Levied	% Change
Chouteau County	21043.78	2.5%	176.83	18.0%
Big Sandy	483.00	-2.5%	142.69	14.0%
Fort Benton	1581.55	2.8%	229.72	12.4%
Geraldine	197.15	4.2%	221.81	18.2%

Source: Montana State University, Local Government Center, www.msulocalgov.org

3. Municipalities

The incorporated areas in Chouteau County are Fort Benton, Big Sandy, and Geraldine. Fort Benton is the county seat and the largest incorporated town with a 2015 population of 1,460. Big Sandy had a 2015 population of 593, and Geraldine had a population of 263. The County also has a number of unincorporated areas including Carter, Loma, Highwood and Square Butte.

Table 2: Selected Information on Incorporated Towns in Chouteau County

Town	Type of Government	Full Time Employees
Fort Benton	Commissioner – Executive	11
Big Sandy	Commissioner – Executive	1.75
Geraldine	Commissioner – Executive	2

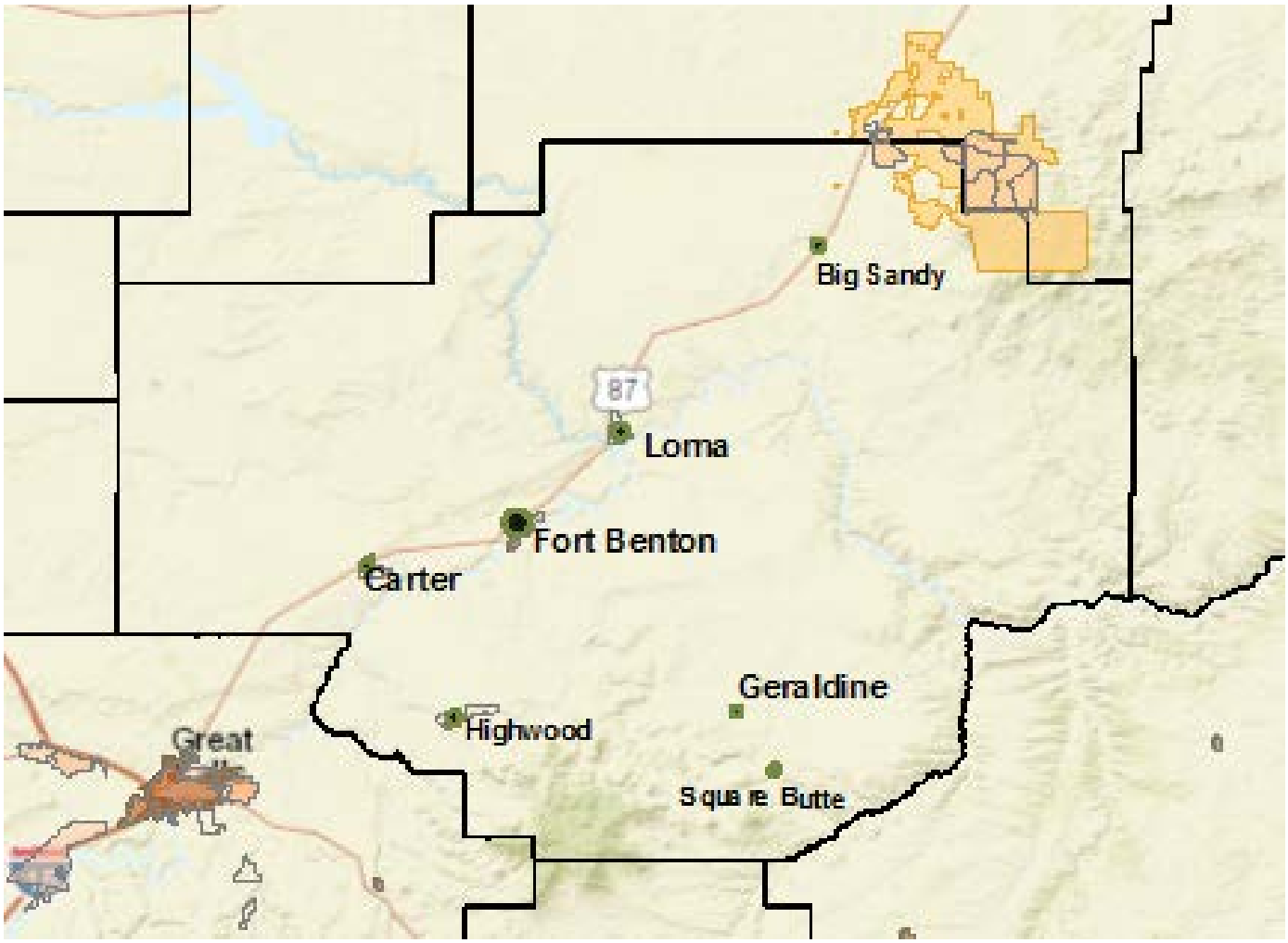
Source: Montana State University, Local Government Center - 2016

4. Rocky Boy's Reservation

The Rocky Boy's Reservation straddles the counties of Hill and Chouteau. The Rocky Boy's Reservation, headquartered at Rocky Boy's Agency, encompasses approximately 122,000 acres. The Tribal Office is located in Hill County. The reservation is home to 55% of the 6,177 enrolled Chippewa Cree tribal members. The name "Rocky Boy" was derived from the name of a leader of a band of Chippewa Indians. It actually meant "Stone Child," but it was not translated correctly from Chippewa into English, and "Rocky Boy" evolved. The tribe call themselves "Ne Hiyawak" which means "those who speak the same language". The reservation's economy is primarily supported by agriculture and livestock. Northern Winz Casino is a wholey owned business of the Chippewa Cree Tribe. The casino was officially opened February 05, 2007

The Chippewa Cree Business Committee is the governing body of the Tribe. The eight Council members and Chairman are elected at large; serving four years on staggered terms. Elections are held in the fall of every even numbered year. Stone Child is a two-year college and offers associate degrees in the Arts and Sciences. (Source: www.tribalnations.mt.gov)

Map 1: Chouteau County Towns



Source: Prepared by Applied Communications using ArcGIS Online

5. Fire Protection

The Fort Benton Fire Department, Fort Benton Rural Fire District, Geraldine Rural Fire District, Highwood Rural Fire District, Big Sandy Rural Fire District, Carter Fire Department, Knees VFC and the Loma Fire Department provide community structural fire suppression and protection. Wildland fire protection is provided by all of the above fire entities plus the Elim VFC under the direction of the county fire warden with various fire suppression resources throughout the County under the Chouteau County Co-Op plan. The wildland fire apparatus is located strategically throughout the county. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan contains a list of fire equipment for each district.

Service calls are dispatched through the County 911 center. Most of the service calls, within the city of Fort Benton, have primarily been in response to property fires. All fire districts in the County are part of a mutual aid agreement and will respond to calls for assistance from other districts. The Fort Benton Fire District will also respond to fires on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land along the Missouri River as a first response until the BLM unit can respond from their Lewistown office. The State Fire Marshall office in Havre assists with commercial inspections, training, and inspections of suspicious fires. The Fire District provides inspections for new construction and maintains an inventory of hazardous materials. The inventory generally includes an annual survey of gas stations and the electrical plant. The County has completed rural addressing for enhanced 911 that is coordinated with the GIS system.

The insurance premiums that residential and commercial customers pay are based on a rating system established by the Insurance Services Office (ISO). In its evaluation of a community, ISO considers the water system and the fire protection provided by the fire department. The ISO rating system produces ten different Public Protection Classifications, with Class 1 receiving the most insurance rate recognition and Class 10 receiving no recognition. A split rating such as Class 6/9 & 10 means that a department is rated as a Class 6 within 1,000 feet of a fire hydrant or certified water point, a Class 9 when over a 1,000 feet from a hydrant and within 5 miles of a fire station, and a Class 10 rating applies when the insured is more than 5 road miles from a fire station. The majority of Chouteau County currently has an ISO rating of Class 10. However, the county's fire departments have worked to lower their ISO ratings. Individual fire departments ratings are listed in the following table:

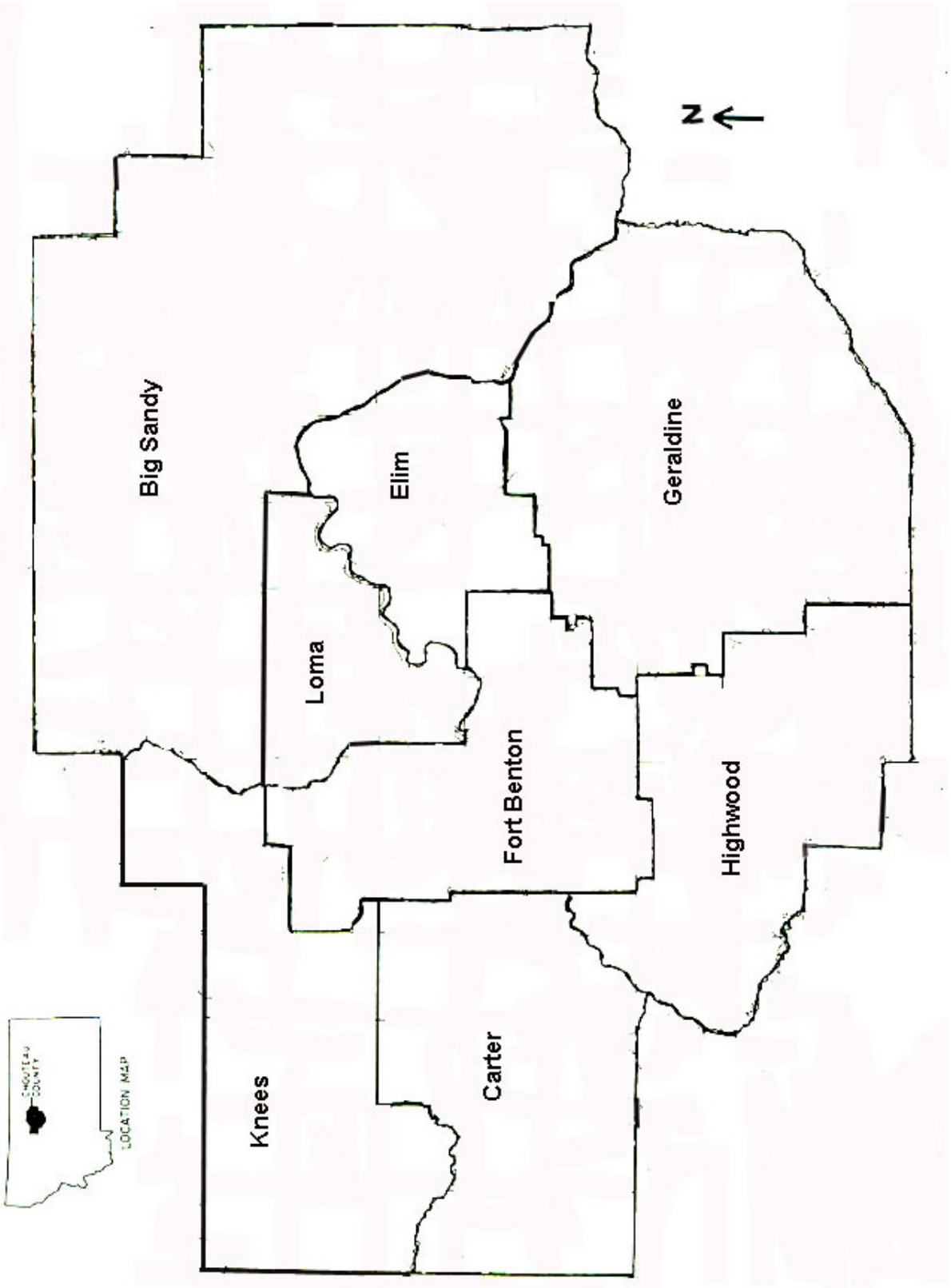
Table 3: Insurance Services Office Ratings of Fire Departments Department Rating

Fire Dept.	ISO Rating
Big Sandy Rural Fire District Class	6/9
Carter VFC Class	9
Elim VFC Class	10
Knees VFC Class	10
Fort Benton FD Class	6
Fort Benton RFD Class	10
Geraldine RFD Class	8
Highwood RFD Class	7/9
Loma FD Class	6/9

Source: Chouteau County Wildfire Protection Plan – 2007, http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/docs/fire-and-aviation/wui

Improvements to the water delivery system, dispatch and the fire departments could improve the ISO rating for the individual fire protection agencies. This would result in potential annual insurance premium savings to the fire department's customers, e.g., home and business owners. It is important to note that some insurance companies will not insure structures that are outside of 5 road miles from a fire station.

Map 2: Chouteau County Rural Fire District Boundaries



6. Community Wildfire Protection Plan

In 2007, Chouteau County adopted a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). The purpose of the plan is to, "…to assist Chouteau County, Chouteau County's Fire Departments and the federal and state wildland agencies in the identification of private and public lands at risk of severe wildland fires and to explore strategies for the prevention and suppression of such fires." The plan contains recommendations and strategies for reducing the risks from wildfires.

A. Wildfire Issues

The CWPP identifies the following wildfire issues in the County:

- The semi arid landscape and poor moisture regime that due to the lack of moisture during any of the four seasons can place the county into a fire season throughout a large share of the year. Many counties in Montana go through periods of long term drought, but few have the extremely arid landscape that even on a good year goes for long period without significant precipitation.

- The significant amount of wind that is generated from the Rocky Mountain Front Range, can turn an ignition into a large wildland fire in a very short period of time.

- The ability to effectively respond to a wildfire is more difficult due to the size and scale of the county and the scattered numbers of outlying fire stations. Tied with this issue is the significant reduction in number in the population of this rural county and age class of available fire fighting personnel.

- Fire fuels in the county include grass, brush, and timber. The grass and brush models cover the largest part of Chouteau County and are the fuel types that result in the highest number of ignitions. In the grass models, the most challenging fire problem results from the Conservation Reserve Program. These parcels of CRP land are scattered around the county, easily ignited, and could result in extreme fire behavior, especially under windy conditions. Other fuel sources include bush land, timbered areas near the Bear Paws and Highwood Mountains and areas of mixed fuel sources.

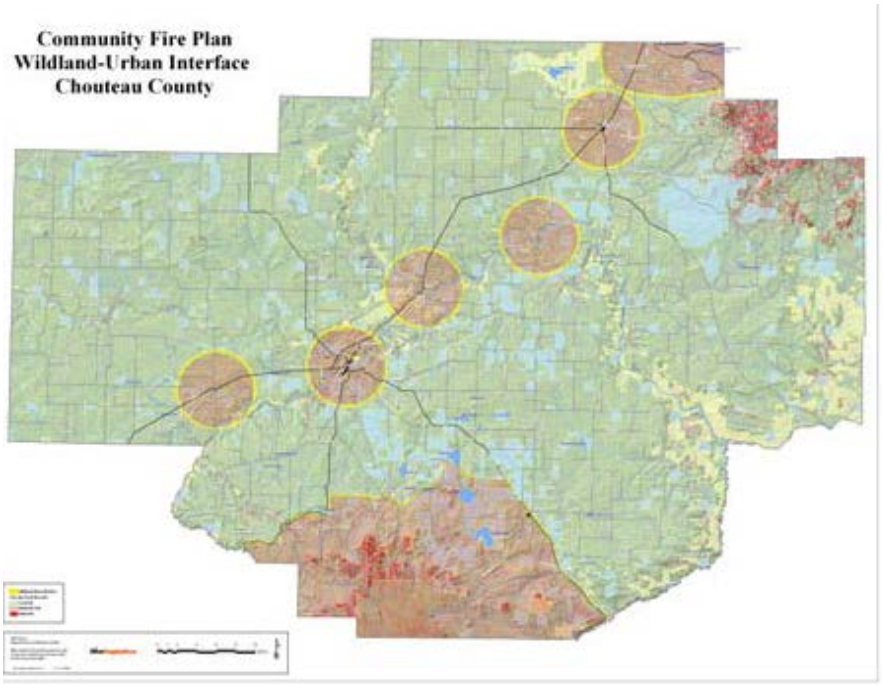
B. Wildfire Urban Interface

The wildland-urban interface (WUI) is defined as the line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels. The CWPP, defines the WUI as, "the wildland-urban interface is defined as a group of homes and other structures with basic infrastructure and services within or adjacent to Federal land; in which conditions are conducive to a large scale wildfire event; and for which a significant threat to human life or property exists as a result of a wildland fire disturbance event." Chouteau County communities that are at risk from wildland fire include:

- Geraldine
- Square Butte
- Duck Creek Drainage
- Box Elder Creek
- Highwood, the Highwood Mountains and associated areas
- Carter*
- Fort Benton*
- Loma*
- Big Sandy*

* At risk from a rangeland or CRP fire.

Figure 1: WUI in Chouteau County



Source: Chouteau County CWPP - 2007

C. Development Standards in the WUI

The CWPP identifies the following factors that threaten the safety of wildland fire fighters:

- Wooden construction and wood shake roofs
- Poor access and narrow congested one-way roads
- Inadequate water supply
- Natural fuels closer than 30 feet to structures
- Extreme fire behavior
- Strong winds
- Need to evacuate the public
- Structures located in chimneys, box or narrow canyons, or on steep slopes in flashy fuels
- Inadequate bridge load limits

With the increasing frequency of wildfires, encroachment of residential areas in the WUI, and the high cost of protecting structures, in 2007 the State Legislature amended Montana Code Annotated section 76-13-104(8)) to require that the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) adopt administrative rules that address development within the wildland/urban interface (WUI). This includes, but is not limited to, best practices for development within the WUI and criteria for providing grant and loan assistance to local government entities to encourage them to adopt those practices. Many communities have adopted Firewise standards for construction of homes in the WUI. (http://www.firewise.org/)

7. Law Enforcement & Public Safety

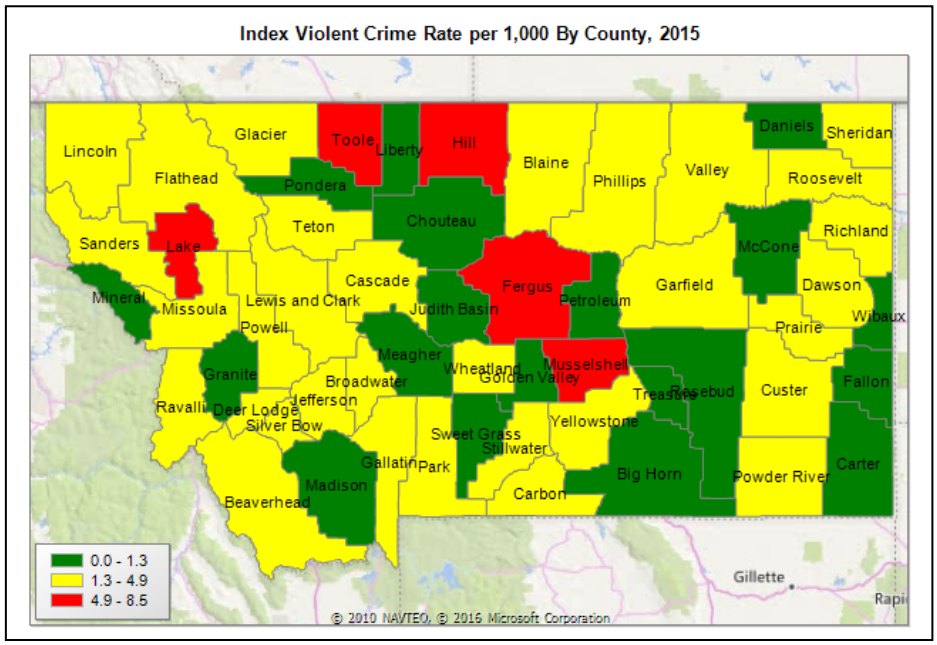
A. County Sheriff

Chouteau County Sheriff's Office covers the towns of Big Sandy, Carter, Fort Benton, Geraldine, Highwood, Loma, Square Butte and all rural areas within Chouteau County. The office is responsible for the investigation and prevention of crime, coroner duties, fire-warden, civil process, bailiff, emergency recovery, detention center operations and emergency services response for a county of over 3900 square miles. The Sheriff's Office employs twenty-one full and part time personnel as sworn peace officers, detention officers and communications officers. Chouteau County also coordinates with the volunteers to run Search and Rescue and the Sheriff's Reserve Deputy Program. The current Chouteau County Law Enforcement Center is located at 1215 Washington and was built in 1986. The facility has 24 bunks with the capacity to expand to 32. In addition to local law enforcement agencies, there are a number of State and Federal Agencies that provide services and coordinate with local officials. The Montana State Highway Patrol provides traffic enforcement for State and Interstate highways. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks and the U.S. Forest Service provide wardens and law enforcement officers who enforce regulations on public lands.

B. Crime Statistics

The index crime rate, representing more serious felony crimes, is typically lower for rural counties than urban counties such as neighboring Cascade County. The overall crime rate for the County, which includes both felony and minor crimes are below 1.3 per 1000 people and, as indicated on the following map, are in the low range for the state of Montana.

Figure : Crime Index by County



Source: Montana Board of Crime Control

Notes: 1. Index Crimes = Homicide, Rape, Robbery, Aggravated Assault, Burglary, Larceny, Motor Vehicle Theft

2. Crime Rate = The rate of the seven index crimes per 100,000 people

C. Chouteau County Department of Disaster and Emergency Services

The Department prepares and manages plans and programs directed at disaster preparedness and coordination of response and recovery. This service is mandated by State Law (10-3-401 MCA) and is provided to the City and County by mutual aid agreement. The Department was involved in the preparations of the "Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan" that was adopted in 2005. The primary purpose of hazard mitigation planning identifies the hazards in the County, sets goals, identifies the appropriate mitigation strategies, and establishes actions to minimize the impacts of the hazards in the County. The plan ranked the following hazards based on their probability for occurrence and the risk to property and human. In 2016, the county initiated an effort to update the plan.

Table 4: Hazard Rankings for Chouteau County

Overall Rank	
Emergency	**Ranking**
Hazardous Materials Incident	15
Wildland Fire	13
Severe Weather	13
Conflagration – Structure Fire	12
Floods	11
Contagious Disease	10
Mass Casualty	10
Agricultural Terrorism	8
Earthquake	8
Airplane Crash	7
Tactical Law Enforcement Incident	7
Dam Failure	6

Source: Chouteau County Hazard Mitigation Plan - 2005

8. Libraries

Chouteau County offers library services at four locations. The main library is located in Fort Benton with branches in Big Sandy, Geraldine, and Highwood. The library building in Fort Benton is located at 1518 Main Street and was constructed in 1917. The library was made handicap accessible in 1988, and a 1994 addition nearly doubled the size of the original Carnegie building.

The Library is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees appointed by the County Commissioners. The library system is funded primarily by county taxes with supplemental funds from the Chouteau County Free Library Foundation and the Friends of the Chouteau County Free Library. The Library is a member of the PathFinder Library Federation. This is a regional organization that reports to the Montana State Library Commission. The Federation office is based in Great Falls. Inter-library loans are available through the Montana State Library system.

The per capita collection of the Chouteau County Library (main library and branches) is higher than the average for libraries with comparable service populations. The per capita circulation size of 11.14 which exceeds the average for libraries in Montana with service areas of 5,000 - 10,000. With the system of a main library and three branches, the residents of Chouteau County have more convenient services and a broader selection of materials. The library system is heavily used with a higher than average number of visits per capita.

Table 5: Chouteau County Library - Selected Statistics (2014-2015)

Library Facts	**Chouteau County**	**Average for Libraries of Comparable Size**
Service Area Population	5813	--
Collection Size (Books, Audio, Video)	64,732	--
Total Annual Visits	24,388	--
Per Capita Collection	11.14	7.70
Per Capita Expenditures	$33.23	$23.47
Per Capita Circulation	10.16	5.28
Registered Borrowers	4,111	--
Full Time Equivalent Employees	4.30	--
Public Computers	15	--

** Figures are the average for Montana libraries with a service area population of 5,001 - 10,000.*

Source: Montana Public Library Annual Report of Statistics, Montana State Library

9. Schools K-12

A. Enrollments

As indicated in the following table, overall enrollment for school districts in the County has declined over the last 10-years. Most of this decline as occurred at the high school in Fort Benton and Big Sandy. There has been an increase in enrollments in Highwood and Geraldine.

Table 6: Public School Enrollment Tends

	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY 15	FY16	Change 06 to 16
FT BENTON ELEM	191	190	171	177	175	184	180	180	195	207	203	12
FT BENTON H S	127	115	114	109	102	89	88	73	80	71	70	(-57)
BIG SANDY ELEM	92	91	97	111	102	108	118	119	127	125	120	28
BIG SANDY H S	70	70	63	50	54	49	52	52	49	49	43	(-27)
WARRICK ELEM	4	6	7	2	3	2	Inactive					
HIGHWOOD ELEM	65	61	56	50	52	58	60	62	Annexed			
HIGHWOOD H S	45	43	43	33	32	29	27	31	96	92	89	44
GERALDINE ELEM	61	56	57	67	63	64	64	Inactive				
GERALDINE K-12 SCHOOLS	37	33	42	39	38	35	26	93	96	96	85	48
CARTER ELEM	7	7	7	9	8	5	7	8	8	5	8	1
KNEES ELEM	14	13	16	16	16	19	19	17	16	16	13	(-1)
BENTON LAKE EL	6	6	9	7	7	14	8	8	6	6	9	3
	719	691	682	670	652	656	649	643	673	667	640	(-79)

Source: Montana Public School Enrollment Data, Office of Public Instruction,
http://www.opi.mt.gov/Reports&Data/Measurement/Index.html

Due to trends towards smaller families and the children of the baby boom generation reaching graduation, the enrollment in schools that are experiencing an increase are generally the result of new families moving into the area. The population in Big Sandy and Fort Benton has remained stable but demographic trends towards an aging population are contributing to a decline of school enrollments.

B. School Facilities (Based on a 1995 Inventory - Updated in 2010 & 2016 via telephone interviews)

- Fort Benton

The Fort Benton Elementary School serves grades K-6. The original brick structure was built in 1937, with an addition built in 1952. The building has been well maintained over the years, having received a new roof and energy efficient windows along with carpet and an asbestos removal project. Since 2000, projects have included a new boiler, renovation of the basketball floor, re-roofing, and revision of office/administrative space. Recently, in 2009, a new metal roof was added to the gym, auditorium and library.

The Fort Benton High School houses both the middle school and high school (7-12). The building was constructed in 1958 with the middle school added in 1969. The building has been well maintained over the years. A new floor was put on in the early 1980's. A large asbestos encapsulation project was carried out on the sprayed-on surfacing material covering the hallways and classrooms of the high school. The material poses no hazard in its present condition. In 2000, there was a major addition to the high school/middle school building that added classrooms and activities areas. In 2001 athletic facilities were upgraded to add storage, locker space, and a wrestling room. Other improvements at the high school since 2000 include a replaced boiler at the Trades and Industry Building, and expansion of the lunchroom area. New windows were installed 2006, and a complete metal roof was added in 2009.

- Big Sandy

The Big Sandy, F.E. Miley Elementary School was built in 1959 with an addition and new pitched roof added in 1990. Energy efficient windows, interior remodeling and complete interior asbestos removal project were also a part of the 1990 project.

Big Sandy High School and Junior High are located in the same building. The High School has been added onto and remodeled several times since being built in 1947. The most recent renovation included an extensive asbestos removal project from the boiler room and new pitched roof over the entire building. The pitched roofs will add years of service to each building. In 2000, the school district remodeled all restrooms to make them handicapped accessible. Currently, in 2010, there is a Quality School’s Grant pending for renovations to lighting and doors.

- Geraldine

The Elementary and High Schools are located in different wings on the same building. The building had an asbestos removal project in the early 1980's and also built a locker room in 1987. The High School is an open classroom concept with all the classrooms being built around the library (constructed in 1972).

Recent enhancements include a blacktop repaving in 2009 and a repainting of the auditorium. There was also the installation of improved acoustic tiles in the auditorium. The roof is being redone and is in the second year of a 3-year (stage) project. An electronic event board was donated and installed on the outside of the building.

- Highwood

The elementary school and high school are located in different wings of the same building. An addition and extensive remodeling project were completed in 1984. The gym was enlarged in 1990. The updates have turned an aging facility into a modern one that will offer many years of service to students and community. Each of the

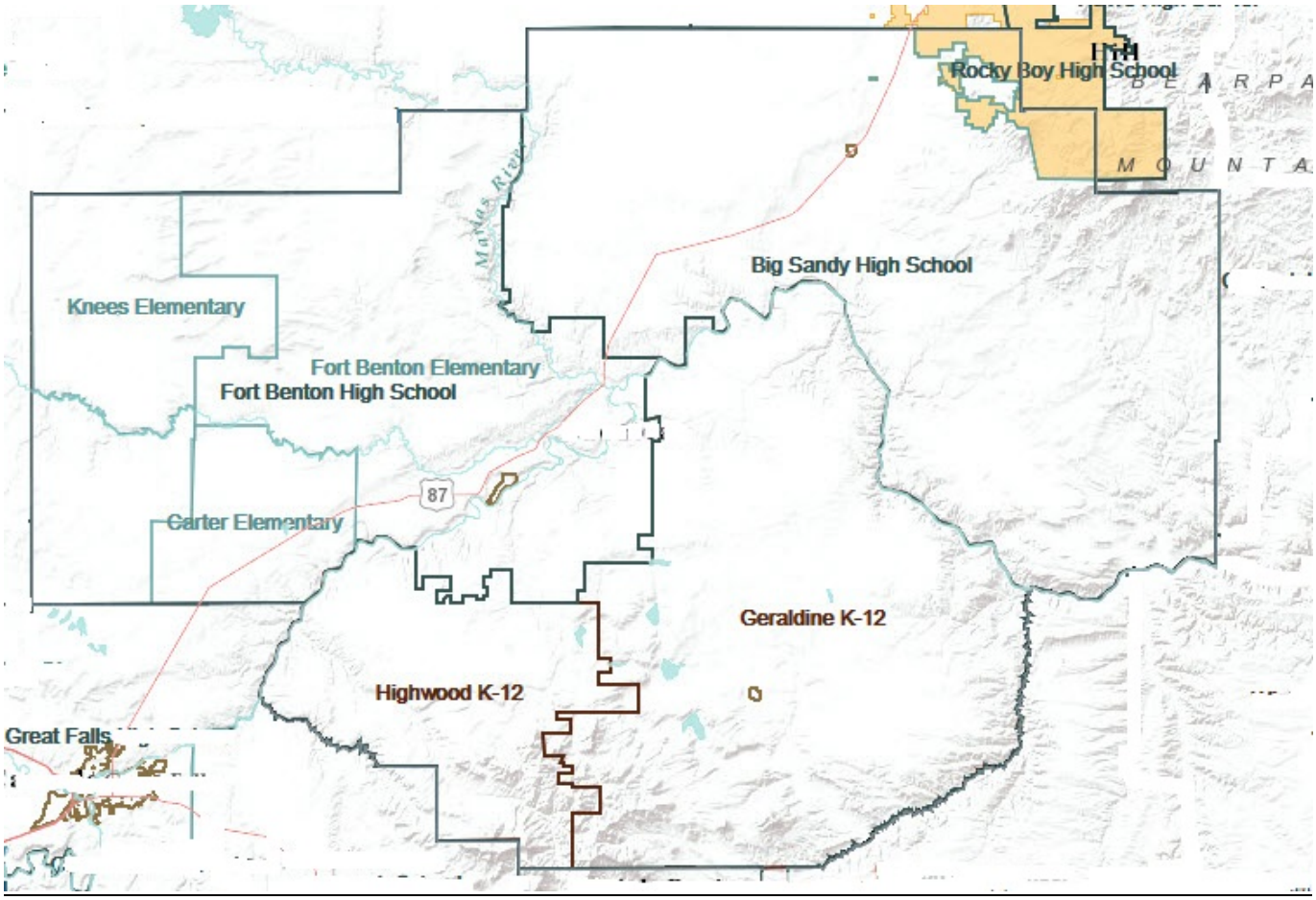
previous schools has a lunchroom, auditorium, gymnasium, library, computer-dedicated classroom, music programs, shop facilities, and foreign language classroom.

The building was re-carpeted in 2008. Energy efficient projects have also been completed including new gym lights and the insulation of the gym roof. There was an upgrade to the roof on the older part of the building, and the ground sprinkler system was upgraded in 2009. In 2008 the superintendent's house (located on school grounds) was enlarged and renovated. An upgrade was also done to the outside concession building and equipment garage.

- Rural Schools

There are three active rural elementary schools in Chouteau County - Carter, Knees, and Benton Lake. These districts serve the most rural parts of the County. They offer a K-8 program, but most of them only have students up to the fourth grade due to the transferring of students to larger schools starting in the fifth grade.

Map 5: School Districts in Chouteau County - 2016



Source: Prepared by Applied Communications with data from Montana State Library

C. Post Secondary

County residents have a number of options to meet needs for continuing and post-secondary education. The closest college campuses are located in Great Falls, approximately 40 miles southwest of Fort Benton. The University of Great Falls is a private four-year University while the Montana University System operates a combined campus for Montana State University Northern (MSUN). The MSUN main campus is in Havre located approximately 75 miles northeast of Fort Benton. Additionally, there is a two-year college, Great Falls College, in Great Falls. College courses are also available via distance learning through the VisionNet interactive video network at the high school. Montana State University has a Cooperative Extension office at the County Courthouse and the Museums also have meeting space for training sessions.

10. Health Care

A. Missouri River Medical Center

The Missouri River Medical Center (MRMC) is located at 1501 St. Charles Street in Fort Benton. The Medical Center is funded in part by a County hospital district that has taxing authority and an elected hospital Board. MRMC is a 7 - bed Critical Access Hospital (district hospital), 45-bed nursing home with a 6-bed assisted living, visiting nurse, and a rural health clinic. The hospital services include emergency care, lab/w-ray and physical/occupational therapy. The Benton Medical Center is a rural health clinic that provides primary care and family medicine. In 2013, MRMC participated in a Community Health Needs Assessment that identified the following priorities.

1. Survey respondents indicated that the three most important components of a healthy community are: 'Access to healthcare and other services' (63.3%), 'Good jobs and a healthy economy' (40.7%), 'Healthy behaviors and lifestyles' (33.3%).
2. The survey indicated that the top three health concerns in the community are: Cancer' (68.9%), 'Overweight/obesity' (38.4%), 'Alcohol abuse/substance abuse' (36.7%).
   a. Significantly more respondents rated 'Overweight/obesity' as a top concern in 2013 versus 2008
3. In 2013, significantly more respondents gave their community's health a lower rating than in 2008 (2013: 41.7% rated the community as 'Very healthy' or 'Healthy'; 2008: 69.8% rated the community as 'Very healthy' or 'Healthy'.
4. The three most - desired healthcare services for the community were: 'Dermatology' (23.2%), 'Massage therapy' (18.1%), and 'Acupuncture' (16.9%).
5. Focus group participants and key informants indicated a need for new and expanded home health services to address the growing aging population in the community.
6. Respondents indicated interest in classes/programs related to: 'Fitness' (27.7%), 'Health and wellness' (27.1%), 'Weight loss' (22.6%), and 'Women's health' (22.6%).
7. Eleven (11%) percent of respondents indicated that there were periods of at least three consecutive months in the past three years where they felt depressed on most days.
8. Thirteen (13%) percent of respondents stated that medication costs had prohibited them from getting a prescription or taking their medication regularly.
9. Approximately 45% of respondents indicated that they were unaware (31.3%) or were unsure (13.8%) of programs that help people pay for healthcare bills.
10. Transportation assistance was cited significantly more often in 2013 than in 2008 when respondents were asked to indicate what they felt would improve their community's access to healthcare. In 2013, significantly more respondents stated that transportation problems were a reason for not receiving needed medical services than in 2008.
11. Respondents indicated that 'Decreased insurance co -pays' (29.9%), 'More primary care providers' (27.7%), and 'More specialists' (20.9%) would improve the community's access to healthcare.

B. Big Sandy Medical Clinic

Big Sandy Medical Center was built in 1965 by the community. A community fund drive was used to raise the needed funds to build the 8 bed hospital and physician's clinic. This original building encompassed 5500 square feet. In 1985, a 22 bed skilled nursing home was added to the original hospital. Services offered by Big Sandy Medical Center included inpatient and outpatient hospital services. The facility offers a full time emergency room, a full service laboratory, x-ray, and physical therapy along with other outpatient services. The hospital is now licensed as an 8 bed Critical Access Hospital. In addition to hospital services, Big Sandy Medical Center provides a 22 bed skilled nursing home and a seven day a week home health agency to care for those that need home care or nursing home services. The clinics offer a full spectrum of family medicine to the community. A FAA approved heli-port adjacent to the hospital provides ready access for those who may need a quick transfer by Mercy flight to Great Falls. Big Sandy Medical Center is a 501(c) 3 not for profit community owned health care facility and employs 46 full and part time employees. In 2015, the Medical Center completed a health assessment and identified the following opportunities.

- BSMC should investigate how it might associate with the Veteran's Administration, to serve the patients who use that service for health care.
- BSMC should actively investigate how it might have physicians or other providers of selected specialties to hold clinic days at the BSMC facility
- BSMC should investigate the possibility of bringing some facet of mental health service to the community, most likely as a visiting professional, as above.
- BSMC should closely monitor the trends concerning the integration of "alternative health disciplines" into mainstream hospital/clinic/nursing home healthcare, and be prepared to integrate those services, when indicated.
- BSMC simply must bring its Internet presence up to date, including a viable, and timely web page containing health information and information about the BSMC organization as a whole.
- BSMC should actively support healthy lifestyle activities, which will further the goals of bettering overall community health.
- BSMC should investigate what other community services it might actively or passively support, with the intention of furthering the goals bettering of community health.
- BSMC should devise specific strategies for the timely dissemination of health-related information to the public, such a s seminars, newsletters, and newspaper articles by providers.

C. Ambulance

Chouteau County has 3 state licensed ambulance services - Fort Benton Memorial Ambulance Service, Big Sandy Ambulance and Geraldine Community Ambulance. The ambulance services are non-profits that are supported by fees, donations, and fundraising. The ambulances are dispatched through the County 911 center and have radios to communicate with the Chouteau County hospitals and Sheriff Department. The ambulances are housed at the Fire Stations. Fort Benton and Big Sandy each have 2 ambulances and Geraldine has one ambulance. The emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are volunteers that have received training and certification. The County Emergency Management Service offers continuing education classes and conferences for EMTs. The ambulance services have mutual aid agreements with each other.

8. Health Statistics

A. Health Indicators

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services maintains statistics for every county in Montana. According to data from the MT DPHHS, Chouteau County has lower that statewide averages for incidents of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. It exceeds state averages for asthma and admissions for injuries. Childhood overweight/obesity rates exceed state averages. Obesity rates are often associated with lifestyle choices such as diet and exercise. More frequently, public health officials are undertaking educational campaigns and working with communities to address to promote more active lifestyles and access to local foods. It is also notable that significant difference in age of death between the white population and Native American population. Native Americans comprise the largest minority group in the county.

The U.S. Health Resource Service Administration designates Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) for primary care, dental care, or mental health providers. Areas may be designated because due to a shortage in a geographic area (a county or service area) or may be designated because a certain population segment (e.g., low income or Medicaid eligible) lacks access to health care professionals. All of Chouteau County is designated as an HPSA for dental and mental health professionals. Big Sandy and Geraldine are designated HSPAs with lack of access to primary care professionals in their geographic area. Fort Benton is designated as an HSPA for low-income access to primary care. (https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/tools/analyzers/hpsafind.aspx

Table 7: Selected Health Indicators for Chouteau County & Montana - 2015

Indicator	Chouteau County	Montana
Inpatient Admissions – Cardiovascular Disease per 100,000	696.5	716.8
Inpatient Admissions – Diabetes per 100,000	795.7	822.5
Inpatient Admissions – Asthma per 100,000	56.4	47.7
Cancer Incidents per 100,000	423.1	429.8
Deaths from Heart Disease per 100,000	162.6	152.4
Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease per 100,000	656.6	716.8
Admissions from injuries per 100,000	568.4	538.6
% Children age 2 to 5 overweight/obese	28.5%	27.9%
% of Children age 2 to 3 with all vaccinations	72.7%	58.5%
Median Age at Death – White Female	84.0	83.0
Median Age at Death – White Male	78.0	76.0
Median Age at Death – Native American Female	--	63.5
Median Age at Death – Native American Male	--	62.5
Health Professional Shortage – Primary Care	Fort Benton – Low Income Geraldine, Big Sandy – Geographic	
Health Professional Shortage – Dental Health	Chouteau County – All areas	
Health Professional Shortage – Mental Health	Chouteau County – All Areas	

Source: http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/Publications/CountyHealthProfiles

12. Social Services

A. Aging Services

The Area on Aging is based in Conrad and serves a multi-county area from Fort Belknap to Cut Bank. The Council on Aging provides funding the Senior Center at 1408 Front Street in Fort Benton and senior centers in Big Sandy, Geraldine, Highwood and Box Elder. The centers also receive supplemental funding through grants and fundraisers. Services at the senior centers vary somewhat but generally include:

- Lunches
- Social activities
- Health services
- Community meeting space
- Meals on wheels

B. Public Health and Human Services

The Chouteau County Department of Public Health is located at 1020 13th Street in Fort Benton. Programs include Better Beginnings, Immunizations, Peace Hospice, and the "Women, Infants, and Children" (WIC) program. The County also offers mental health counseling services at the same facility. Fees are determined by a sliding scale. The State Health Office out of Great Falls responds to environmental health activities that involve the licensing and inspection of certain facilities.

C. Big Sandy Industries

Big Sandy Activities, Inc (BSA) is a not-for-profit agency that provides state mandated services and support to 21 developmentally disabled residents. BSA receives funding from the Montana Department of Health and Human Services and Medicaid. It employs 44 people in eight different programs.

D. Opportunities Inc. - Human Resource Development Council

Human Resource Development Councils (HRDCs), they are part of a nationwide network of over 1000 agencies first created in 1964 and known as "Community Action Agencies." There are ten councils in the State and each serves a multi-county region. Montana's HRDCs operate a wide variety of different programs such as home energy assistance and weatherization, emergency food and shelter, workforce -training, affordable housing, child care and child feeding, Head Start and a variety of other family self-sufficiency programs. Chouteau County is served by the HRDC in Great Falls. (http://www.gfoppinc.org/)

Chouteau County Growth Policy
Survey Analysis

1-10-17

1. Where do you live?

Fort Benton	64.9%	50
Big Sandy	9.1%	7
Geraldine	13%	10
Loma	0%	0
Highwood	5.2%	4
Carter	2.6%	2
Square Butte	0%	0
In rural are of County	15.6%	12
Don not live in County	0%	0
Total		77

2. What is your age?

18 – 24	7.8%	6
25-34	10.6%	8
35-44	14.9%	14
45-54	27.7%	20
55-64	31.9%	24
65-74	6.4%	5
75 or older	0%	0

3. How long have you been a resident of Chouteau County?

Less than five years	22.1%	17
Five to ten years	11.7%	9
Ten to 20 years	16.9%	13
More than 20 years	49.4%	38

4. Please indicate the degree you agree or disagree with the following economic development strategies.

Support small business	3.82
Attract and create new jobs in the county	3.62
Promote value added agriculture products from the county	3.51
Strengthen Main Street businesses and revitalize downtown	3.33
Increase workforce development and training opportunities	3.29
Support renewable energy investment (i.e. wind, solar)	3.25
Support increased tourism	3.19
Support Internet based home business and work opportunities	3.11

5. **Indicate the degree you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding infrastructure and local services in the town or area where you live.**

Roads and streets need to be improved	3.55
We need faster/cheaper Internet Service	3.21
There needs to be more activities for young people	3.17
The water systems need to be upgraded where I live	3.05
The county needs better access to health care services	2.92
We need more places to shop	2.92
The sewer system needs to be upgraded where I live	2.78
The county has adequate resources to respond to disasters	2.67
Transit options should be expanded	2.61
The area where I live needs more trails	2.07
The area where I live needs more parks	1.91

6. **Please indicate the degree you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding land use and natural resources.**

Protecting water quality should be a priority	3.62
Properties that have been contaminated with hazardous substances should be cleaned up	3.55
The county or towns should preserve historic properties	3.42
Protecting private property rights is important	3.42
New development should not increase property taxes	3.12
Conservation easements are a good way to protect open space and wildlife habitat	3.04
Noxious weeds are a problem	3.03
New growth should be located near existing towns	3.03
Identify new areas for commercial development	3.03
Identify new areas for industrial development	2.99
Natural resource development (oil & gas) would be good for the county	2.73

7. **Tell us how important each feature of Chouteau County is to you**

Clean air	3.84
Clean water	3.83
Agriculture	3.70
Sense of community	3.67
Friendly people	3.66
Small town/rural lifestyle	3.65
Affordable housing	3.65
Wildlife	3.58
Mountains	3.57
Open Space	3.56
Scenic Vistas	3.40

8. Please indicate the degree you agree or do not agree with the following statements regarding housing in the town where you live.

There is a shortage of rental units	3.44
There are vacant and dilapidated houses in town	3.29
The cost to purchase a home is too high for the average worker	3.16
Lack of affordable lots and/or homes to buy	3.16
Rents are too high for the average worker	3.07
Lack of infrastructure to support new developments	2.99
Older mobile homes that do not meet current standards	2.65
Not enough building sites for apartments	2.52
Not enough building sites for new homes	2.47

Comments:

- Let's build on and preserve what we have, rather than trying to build new homes, commercial & industrial areas. To preserve our small-town heritage and value, I believe we should encourage local small businesses, and make it hard or impossible for outside corporations (Wal-Mart, Starbucks, etc.) to come in and put those small businesses out of business. If we focus on building and maintaining a superior quality of life here, more people will come, fleeing the cities and returning to their roots. Sustainable growth will come from tourism, value-added agriculture, and technological innovation. Let's make sure we are educating our kids well, and investing in innovative, sustainable ideas and industry.

- The city of Fort Benton lacks any kind of positive activities for our kids. Yes, we have sports and that seems to be our only focus when it comes to our kids. But what about the others who do not do sports? Or the summer time? Our kids seem to drink and do drugs, and that seems to be a BIG PROBLEM IN FORT BENTON. As adults, it is our responsibility to find other outlets for our kids. It is also our responsibility to enforce the underage drinking, partying and drug problem. We need to have higher standards and we need to be held accountable.

- We need to find more jobs for younger people who have families,

- My perception is that rents can be too high, or not, but that often times there are many who simply don't like paying whatever the rate is; anything over $250/month is "too high". Infrastructure surely is important but the statement "Lack of infrastructure to support new development" is not a statement of fact. It may be that certain areas will need investment to meet new capacity, but that doesn't mean the capacity isn't there. There is a significant problem in these sparsely populated rural areas that everyone is being taxed too much and that they then should be getting everything they need/want at no additional burden to them. There is a cognitive disconnect between what it costs them to buy their equipment today as compared to 20 years ago, with no appreciation that making infrastructure improvements will surely cost more than it did when it was installed, most normally much further in the past than just 20 years. Surely, it's partially a result of a caustic political environment where distrust of the public sector is so rife. Focusing new development near existing towns only makes sense. Building on virgin ground out with concentrations of utilities and infrastructure is inefficient and wasteful. That said, private land ownership and a desire to accept development of any sort makes it difficult to suggest/encourage proponents to consider particular

areas that might be better suited long-term to the betterment of the whole at the marginal expense to the few. Good luck making this meaningful, and I mean that sincerely.

- The county commissioners are idiots.

- Affordable housing is a real issue

- Of the many building sites available, few are feasible to develop due to the cost of utilities made available to the sites.

- Need to remove flour & chick pea operation in residential area. Between the dust and noise brought property values down

- Investments must be made concerning our infrastructure to attract new growth, both residential and commercial. We must catch up with and promote the work from home/online entrepreneur option that provide many people with good sources of income while not restricting their job location.

- If we are going to grow we need volunteers for emergency services such as fire and ambulance. We are a desperate skeleton crew right now with no new volunteers on the horizon. Members of the Gen-X and Millennial generation do not volunteer for anything more difficult than texting their friends, and us Baby Boomers are getting too old to lift patients. We are now becoming the medical emergencies due to ageing. Bottom line we can't handle more calls. The county is going to have to look at paid staff on ambulance and fire or the pagers will go off and no one will respond. I'm not kidding!

- It would be nice to have city and county officials who are proactive rather than reactive.