

GROWTH POLICY

PETROLEUM COUNTY

TOWN OF WINNETT

2022 REVISION - 11.22

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 Purpose

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan. It evaluates existing community conditions and sets goals and future visions for housing, land use, economic development, local services, public safety, natural resources, transportation, and other unique characteristics and features of the community. A Growth Policy is not a regulation or ordinance, but it serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

1.2 Geographic Scope

Petroleum County/Town of Winnett Growth Policy takes into consideration all areas of the County.

1.3 Authority

Petroleum County Commissioners and the Town Council of Winnett, in an effort to address the most critical issues facing the County and Town now and in the near future have authorized the Petroleum County Planning Board with a representative of the Town of Winnett to develop a County/Town Growth Policy in accordance with 76-1-601-76-1-606, Montana Code Annotated (MCA). The requirements outlined in these statutes constitute the contents of this Growth Policy.

1.4 Planning in Petroleum County/Town of Winnett

Petroleum County is governed by a Board of County Commissioners and employs a County Manager. The appointed Planning Board is made up of five volunteer county residents.



The County Planning Board recently adopted subdivision regulations. The County also has road and bridge standards that are utilized in planning and governing transportation infrastructure improvements.

The Town of Winnett is a mayor/council form of government with limited resources for full time employees. Though planning efforts in the Town have been somewhat limited, it does utilize a Capital Improvements Planning process that is updated each year during budgeting. Future additional planning efforts such as participation in this Growth Policy process are important for the Town's ongoing need to upgrade infrastructure.

This Growth Policy is the result of an identified need for the community to examine the issues affecting the economy, population, and culture of Petroleum County and the Town of Winnett. The document will coordinate with existing policies and standards currently in existence.

1.5 Public Involvement

As members of the Planning Board stated while discussing community outreach, *"With less than 500 people in the County, every able bodied person serves on at least one volunteer board."* Though that situation might be somewhat burdensome at times, it is a testament to how involved citizens in the County are when it comes to making life in this ultra-rural community better for everyone. Tapping into community activities was the strategy for gaining public involvement in development of the Growth Policy, and will be the strategy for the future.

Thank you to the following groups, organizations, and businesses for participating in outreach regarding the content of the Growth Policy:

- Winnett School District #1 School Board – presentation and inclusion of information about the Growth Policy and survey in newsletter
- Petroleum County Conservation District – presentation and inclusion of information about the Growth Policy and survey in newsletter
- Library Board
- Cemetery Board
- Stockgrowers Board
- Winnett Senior Citizens
- Petroleum County Ambulance Service
- Town Council
- Weed District

Two survey instruments were created in 2017 for use in assisting the planning board with identifying issues and attitudes that would help guide them in developing the Growth Policy. The results of those instruments are contained in Appendix A. Although a total of 19 individuals completed the long form survey and only 4 completed the short form survey, the planning board felt the results were likely representative of the entire population of the Town/County. The results of those surveys will be referenced throughout this document.



New surveys and reviews of the citizens of our community have taken place between 2017 and 2022 associated with the many projects that are currently taking place. These include:

- Petroleum County Community Center
- Revitalization of the Courthouse Building
- Move and Revitalization of the old Odd Fellows Hall
- Development of a new Youth Program
- County History Wall in the Community Center

The community outreach during the planning of these projects will continue to guide our Growth Policy, as well.

1.6 Document Organization

The Petroleum County/Town of Winnett Growth Policy is organized in a manner that highlights the required elements of 76-1-601-76-1-606, MCA. Each section provides current information about the element as it relates to the existing conditions of Petroleum County/Town of Winnett followed by projections that may affect the future of the County. Goals and Objectives developed through the Planning Board's study of each issue, including public input, are also included in each section.

An implementation plan that takes into account each goal and objective developed is presented at the end of the document. The plan sets a timeframe for accomplishment. For future tracking, additional columns are added for regulations used in implementation, funding sources, and date completed.



2. County Background

Petroleum County is located in Central Montana and is one of the most sparsely populated areas of the United States, making it geographically and culturally unique. The extreme rural nature of the area contributed to it being “prime hunting ground for the Indians and one of the last places in Montana to be given up to the white man”.

The area encompassing Petroleum County has a history of boom and bust cycles tied to its natural environment. The County is bordered by the Musselshell River to the east and the Missouri River to the north, which were instrumental in attracting settlers during the open range explosion in the late-1800s. The wide open spaces lured cattlemen and sheepmen alike, as competition for grazing land was minimal and the rivers and streams provided the necessary resources for ranching.

Attempts to settle the area and build towns failed a number of times. In 1866, the Rocky Mountain Wagon Road Company launched a freight route across the mountains south of the Missouri River to the mouth of the Musselshell. They named the town built at the end of the road Kerchival City; the Musselshell River soon washed away the little town. In March of 1868, the Montana Hide and Fur Company of Helena sent a nine member party, led by James Brewer, to plot a town and build a warehouse. They named this new settlement situated on a bluff above the river, Musselshell. In 1874, the Diamond R Transportation Company built Carroll approximately 30 miles upstream from the mouth of the Musselshell. Like its counterparts, Carroll thrived for only a few years. All three towns are now covered by the waters of Fort Peck Reservoir.

The Town of Winnett is named after Walter John Winnett, who established his family ranch near an active trading post in Montana Territory in 1879. Winnett established a freight line business to transport supplies to the settlement, and eventually his ranch became the center of growth for the area.

The 1880s saw the open range boom as well as developing settlements. The cattlemen and sheepmen ran their stock on the open grasslands with few competitors. The Junction City-Maginnis Stage Road traveled through the area to where gold was discovered in 1879 in the Judith Mountains. The Flatwillow Crossing, which developed into the town of Flatwillow, complete with a hotel, general store, saloon, school, community hall and even a baseball team, served as a station on this route.



In 1910, when the homestead boom began, Fergus County still encompassed all of present day Petroleum County. Routes to the area consisted of a few roads, passable only in good weather. The largest waves of settlers rolled into the Winnett area during 1910 and again from 1912 to



1918. The railroad was not completed to Winnett until 1917 so most of the initial homesteaders came in by stage from Lewistown or Musselshell or many simply walked in. They would come in, find their land and then go back out to Lewistown or Musselshell to file their claim. Once the railroad was complete it greatly aided new homesteaders in reaching the remote lands of what was to become Petroleum County.

While homesteaders continued to arrive until the 1930s, an exodus began in 1918. In just six years since the majority of homesteading began, the land filled, the people realized the impossibility of surviving on 160 acres on the unforgiving lands and began to leave. The end of World War I, falling market prices, and the flu epidemic of 1918 contributed to this mass departure. Also, years of drought, and the resulting economic hardships led to bleak years prior to 1920.

The tides turned in February 1920, however, when an oil discovery again brought hope and excitement to the young town. The discovery, located just west of the Musselshell River near the communities of Mosby and Cat Creek, slowed the departure of outgoing homesteaders and created boomtowns of Winnett and Cat Creek. This oil strike generated the first commercial oil field in Montana, and led to a significant influx of homesteaders and companies. It was this oil strike that led to the county name of Petroleum County.

Residents voted to secede from Fergus County on November 4, 1924, and the new county government began operating as Petroleum County on February 22, 1925 with Winnett as the county seat. The growth and the accompanying optimism from the oil boom and county separation lasted only briefly. Winnett went from an estimated population of 2,000 in 1923 to 408 in 1930.

The Great Depression in Montana began with a severe drought in 1929 that reached disastrous proportions by 1931. Governor John Erickson wrote that the people were “in rather a desperate condition. The grain crops and feed crops are practical failures.”

The 1930s and the Great Depression gave way to World War II and more prosperous years but the local government in Petroleum County continued to struggle. The debt it accrued during the 1920s by building roads and other services multiplied during the Depression. The decrease in privately owned property led to a drop off in property tax operating revenue for the county. At the start of the 1940s, the county asked Roland R. Renne, president of Montana State College (now Montana State University), to investigate another form of government for the struggling region. He suggested the county manager form and the county adopted it in 1942. Petroleum is the only county in Montana that operates under a county manager form of government.

The town and county continued to work to improve the community. In the 1960s the first community pool was built, in the 1970s the county courthouse was extensively remodeled and a new school addition was completed, with the public library moving into the school to become the only school-community library in the state. The town completed a new water and sewer system



in the 1980s. The largest torosaurus skull yet found was extracted from Petroleum County in 2001.

Ranches in Petroleum County occupy large acreages by necessity. With an average of 13 inches of moisture annually which contributes to a lack of forage or crops, it takes a lot of acres to make a sustainable livestock or farming operation. There are also areas of dry land farming and minimal irrigated land because there are a minimal number of creeks or streams flowing through the county.

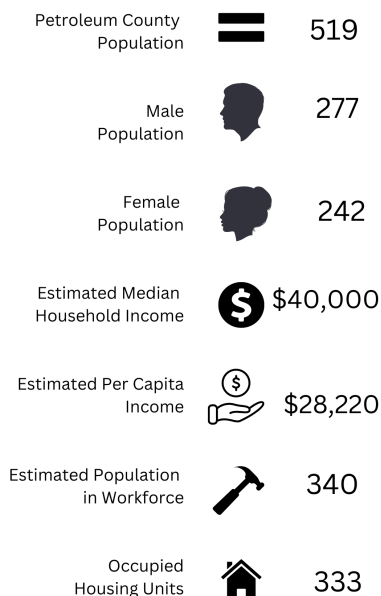
The community is proud of its clean air, clean water, and access to the outdoors. This safe, tight-knit community boasts local services that provide basic necessities, an award-winning school, and opportunities for all ages. The community is shaped by the active participation of its residents which allows opportunity for everyone to be involved in the decision-making of various aspects of the community and sets this community apart from larger, urban areas.



3. Population

3.1 Demographics

Figure 1. Demographics



*Figures approximated based on US Census Bureau figures (as percentages) multiplied by the 519 population

Petroleum is the least populated County in Montana with a total population of 519 at the July 1, 2021 US Census Population Estimate. Approximately 313 people (60%) live outside the Town limits of Winnett, the County seat and only town in the County.

For much of the last 90 years, the County population has gradually declined since its highest census-recorded population in 1930 of just over 2000 residents. That population number reflected the oil boom of the time but was short-lived when the oil boom did not meet the expectations of the oil exploration industry and the Great Depression caused a significant decline in population. Homesteaders with hopes of making their living in agriculture discovered that the acreage allotted for homesteads was far too small to make a living in the semi-arid land of the county and the drought also forced large numbers of those county residents to leave the area to seek opportunities elsewhere.

However, the population growth during the 2020 - 2021 time period shifted what was otherwise a steady population from 2010 - 2020. A former slow but steady decline in population in Petroleum County continues to be attributed to individuals seeking employment and economic opportunities in other areas of the state or country. Modernization of agricultural practices requires fewer people and, with agriculture as the primary economic driver of the County, fewer opportunities for employment are available. Ranches in the County, though still primarily family run operations, have consolidated and require fewer employees. Other issues identified as barriers to growth have included a lack of housing and medical care.



As of 2020, the median age in the County is 49.6, with most of the population being between the ages of 35 and 74. Adults over the age of 65 make up over 28.5% of the population, while children under 18 years make up only 14.3% of the population.

3.2 Projections

Census information is somewhat conflicting given the estimated population of the County by the ACS. That survey shows a decline in population in Petroleum since 2020 but, according to projections compiled by the Census and Economic Information Center through the Montana Department of Commerce, Petroleum County was expected to increase in population since 2020 with a continued steady increase over the next ten years with an estimated population of 591 in 2030.

With limited employment opportunities, housing, or medical care, fewer young families have migrated to the area in the past; however that trend seems to have reversed in the last couple of years. It is suspected that the population will either steady at current rates or perhaps will continue to grow. Retirement aged adults may find the County/Town a relatively inexpensive option for living expenses covered by fixed incomes which may increase the population over the age of 65. However, as medical issues arise, elderly residents may continue to be forced to seek assisted living facilities outside the County.

3.3 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

In the near term (over the next 5 years) stabilize population at or above current levels and in the long term (over the next 10-20 years) grow the population by 5%. This translates to a net gain in residents of approximately 75 individuals.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Encourage aesthetic improvement efforts to foster community pride and to present our best community to possible new residents.
- ❖ Support the needs of the Winnett School District
- ❖ Support policies that encourage local employment.
- ❖ Identify areas for future growth within the Town of Winnett and help facilitate extension of municipal capital improvements when appropriate.
- ❖ Actively engage young adults in community leadership positions.
- ❖ Seek community marketing activities that emphasize the beauty, solitude, small town atmosphere, and recreational opportunities in the area in an attempt to attract new businesses (such as telecommuters) and their families.
- ❖ Support efforts that maintain agriculture production at a rate that supports families.
- ❖ Identify economic development activities that encourage local job creation.

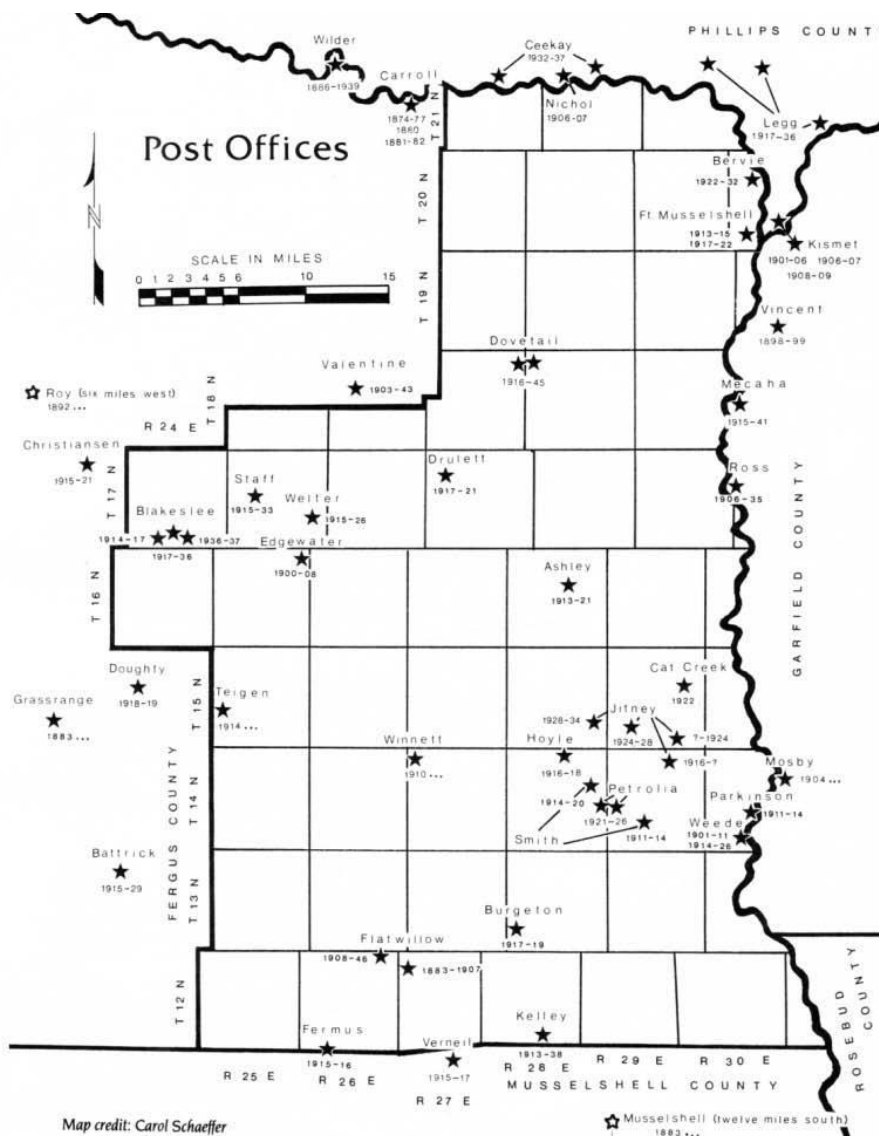


4. Land Use

4.1 Land Description

Petroleum County encompasses 1,067,757 acres South and West of the confluence of Musselshell and Missouri Rivers. Geographically, the County is approximately the size of the state of Rhode Island. Approximately 615,420 (57.6%) acres are privately owned and 452,337 acres are publicly owned by a variety of entities including the Montana State Department of Natural Resources and the United States Department of Interior. Specifically, the US Fish and Wildlife Service owns the CMR lands which has 56,254 acres while the US Bureau of Land Management lands tally to 331,488 acres. Winnett is the only incorporated Town in Petroleum County and is the County Seat.

Figure 2. Historic Post Office Locations Map Evidence of the once populous area.





4.2 Existing Land Use

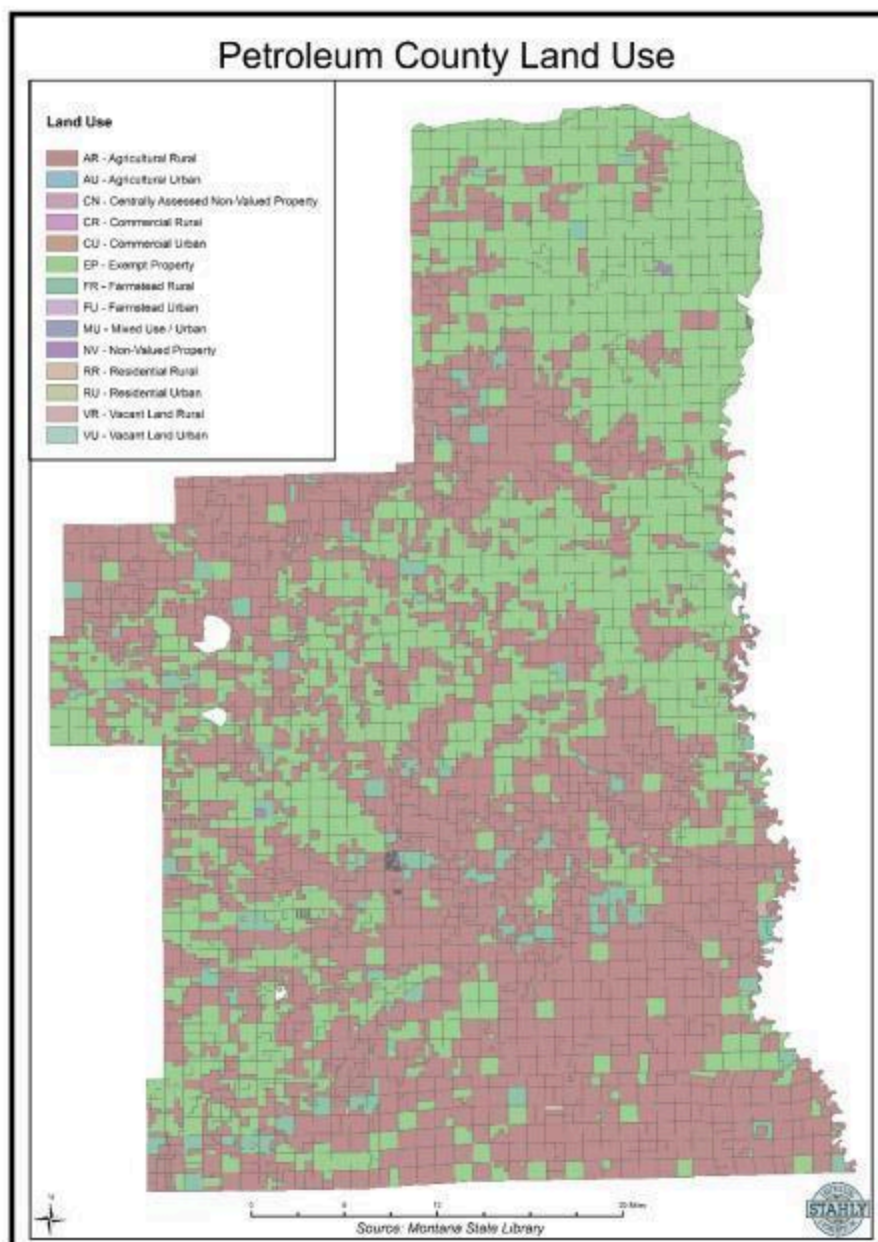
Land Ownership

Land use classification definitions have been determined by the Montana State Legislature. These classifications and definitions can be viewed in depth on the Montana Department of Revenue's website at the following link: <https://revenue.mt.gov/property-types>

Residential property consists of single family residences including trailers, manufactured homes, and rental multi-family dwelling units. Commercial property consists generally of income-producing property such as office buildings, restaurants, shopping centers, motels, etc.

Agricultural property is classified as such based on ownership, parcel size, and agricultural use.

Figure 3. Petroleum County Land Use, 2017

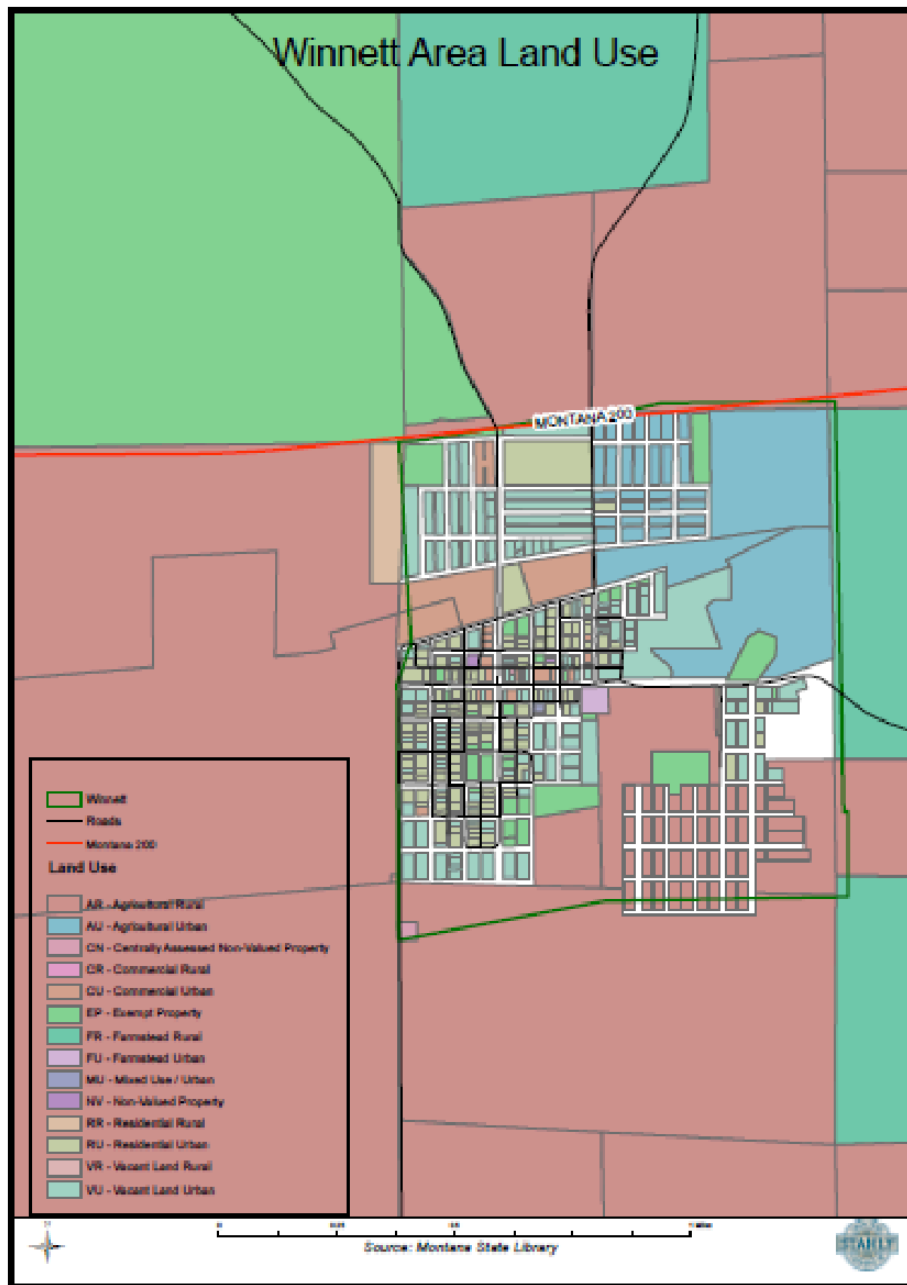




The most prevalent land use classification in the County is Agricultural Rural, which totals 576,640 acres or 53.8% of the County. The next more prevalent land use classification is Farmstead Rural, which totals 34,483 acres or 3% of the County. Other land classifications including Commercial Rural, Residential Urban, Commercial Urban, Vacant Land Urban, and Residential Rural make up the remaining parcels in the County.

The Town of Winnett is mostly parcels classified as Residential Urban, Agricultural Urban, and Vacant Land Urban, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Winnett Area Land Use





State and Federal agencies including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the MT Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks own and manage lands within Petroleum County. Table 1 details all public land ownership including acreage and percent of total acres. This information was obtained from the Montana State Library and the Montana Natural Heritage Program, which obtains its information from state and federal agencies.

Table 1. Public Land Ownership

Name	Acres	% of total acres in the County
USDI Fish Wildlife Service	56,254	5%
USDI Bureau of Land Management	331,488	31%
State of Montana	191	< 1%
State of Montana Trust Lands	63,791	6%
Local Government	696	< 1%
Total Public-Owned Land:	452,337	42%
Total Privately-Owned Land:	615,420	58%
Total Acres in County:	1,067,757	

4.3 Future Land Use Projections

Future land use in the County is expected to remain primarily Agricultural Rural where livestock ranching will be the prevalent use of the land. Agricultural families in Petroleum are aging and facing the difficulties of passing their operations on to younger generations, causing opportunities for outside investors to purchase those lands. Many of those large parcels may continue to operate in agriculture but are usually staffed with employees rather than owners.

As parcels of land are being sold to recreationalists and absentee owners buy land in Petroleum County, we will seek opportunities to engage these new landowners in our community and invite them to be part of the solution of providing more opportunities for area producers. Research has found that most absentee landowners are currently (as of 2022) either keeping their land in production, employing local managers, or leasing their land to local producers; however, over time this could change and should be monitored. Fostering opportunities for young families to get into viable agricultural operations would potentially maintain the agricultural economy of the County and build a strong foundation for a new crop of landowners who will develop roots to weather the challenges of doing business in agriculture.

Additionally, large parcels of land are being sold as small parcels of land geared toward recreational use instead of agriculture. Often, unfortunately, those bits of land are generally no longer used for production agriculture, and so there is an additional loss to the county.

Future land use in the town of Winnett is expected to remain similar to existing land use, much of which is residential with only a few parcels being used for commercial applications. For the future of land use in Winnett, we would like to see an increase of commercial applications on the main thoroughfares of town.



Recognizing agriculture as the primary industry of the county, the Right to Farm legislation will be used as one form of protection.

76-2-901. Agricultural activities -- legislative finding and purpose. (1) The legislature finds that agricultural lands and the ability and right of farmers and ranchers to produce a safe, abundant, and secure food and fiber supply have been the basis of economic growth and development of all sectors of Montana's economy. In order to sustain Montana's valuable farm economy and land bases associated with it, farmers and ranchers must be encouraged and have the right to stay in farming. (2) It is therefore the intent of the legislature to protect agricultural activities from governmental zoning and nuisance ordinances.

Overpopulation of certain wildlife leads to overgrazing and trampling and limits the production that is necessary to ensure a secure food supply. Bison in Petroleum County will continue to be classified as livestock as per Petroleum County Resolution No. 11, A Resolution Declaring Buffalo or Bison in Petroleum County as Domestic Livestock, and an Ordinance by Petroleum County Conservation District to declare all bison/buffalo within Petroleum County to be livestock, 19-01.

Petroleum County is dependent on revenue from taxes on private lands, the livestock that graze those lands or the equipment used for that agricultural operation. It is imperative to our ability to sustain our county operations that when State or Federal agencies acquire, sell or trade lands that our county suffers no net loss of deeded lands so that our tax base does not diminish due to the ability of a government agency to increase its land holdings. When a government agency acquires deeded acreage within Petroleum County, it should offer an equal amount of acreage of its land holdings within Petroleum County to the public to purchase. In this way, Petroleum County will have no net loss of deeded lands.

Petroleum County will not endorse any federal or state monument, wilderness, or wildland designations unless it has support of the Petroleum County constituents and the Petroleum County Commissioners.

4.4 Policy, Regulatory, and Financial Items

There are a variety of tools that can be used by the County and Town to implement land use goals and objectives. This section is intended to define those tools. Not all land use policies and regulatory tools are appropriate for rural Montana communities and, therefore, local government must carefully consider the use of each of these in their deliberations regarding land use decisions.

Policies that can be used to implement future land use goals and objectives are:

- Long range planning
- Targeted Economic Development District (TEDD)
- Prime farmland/agricultural preservation

Regulatory tools that can be used to implement and enforce future land use goals and objectives are:

- Subdivision regulations including design standards



- Zoning regulations
- Conservation easements
- Floodplain regulations
- Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations

Financial items that can be used to implement the future land use goals and objectives are:

- Grants
- Taxation changes
- Land acquisition
- Capital Improvements Plans
- Targeted Economic Development (TED) Districts
- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts
- Education towards and development of more valuable commodities that thereby make ranches / farms more profitable
- Historic tax credits
- New market tax credits
- Regional / multi-county Port Authority

4.5 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Preserve existing land uses by encouraging compatible development.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Maintain updated subdivision regulations to reflect changes in state requirements or land use patterns.
- ❖ Adopt state mandated Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations.
- ❖ Consider zoning or other policies that may limit the type of development allowed
- ❖ Encourage the enforcement of existing ordinances that encourage the visual appearance of our community
- ❖ Encourage the voluntary preservation of open space, wildlife habitat, and domestic livestock in the County.
- ❖ Encourage local government involvement in working with oil and gas and alternative energy developers to preserve land use.
- ❖ Support the continued classification of bison as livestock.
- ❖ Coordinate land use policies and infrastructure development to preserve water resources.

GOAL

Promote agriculture and preserve the agricultural use of existing private, state, and federal lands.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Support the development of the area's agricultural resources.
- ❖ Consider adopting zoning or other policies that would regulate rural residential developments.
- ❖ Identify opportunities for providing education on land use practices.
- ❖ Invoke Right to Farm legislation where appropriate.

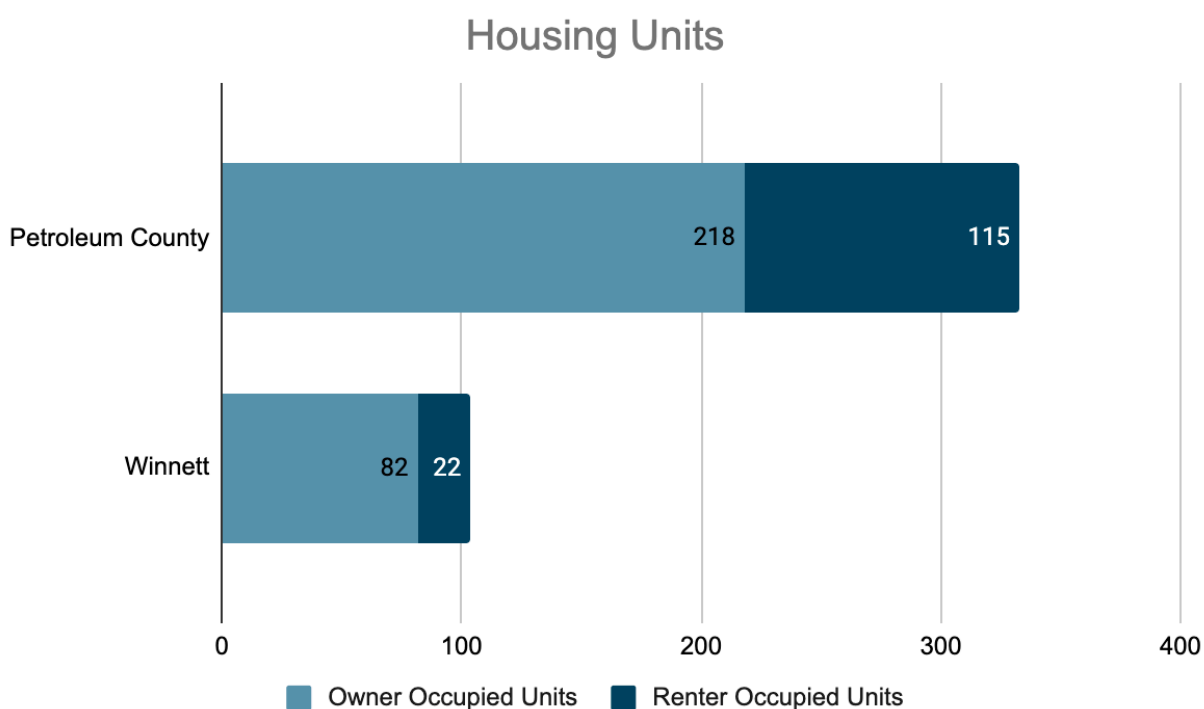


5. Housing

5.1 Current Characteristics and Conditions

Petroleum County, combined with the Town of Winnett, has a total of 333 housing units serving 212 households, according to the 2020 Census. Multi-unit structures account for only 2.7% of the housing units. Overall, access to homeownership and rentals, as well as the affordability of housing, currently appears to be a non-issue for residents of the subject area. Improvement to the quality of housing would potentially add to the attractiveness of the County and Town as an area for growth.

Figure 5. Housing Units



Although the population in Petroleum County was essentially unchanged between 2010 and 2020, the County was among other rural Montana counties with a decline in the percentage of home ownership. The number of owner occupied units decreased during this time frame, as well as the number of total occupied housing units; however, with an owner occupied rate of 66%, Petroleum County is slightly above the average for Montana, with the average state rate of homeownership at 69%.

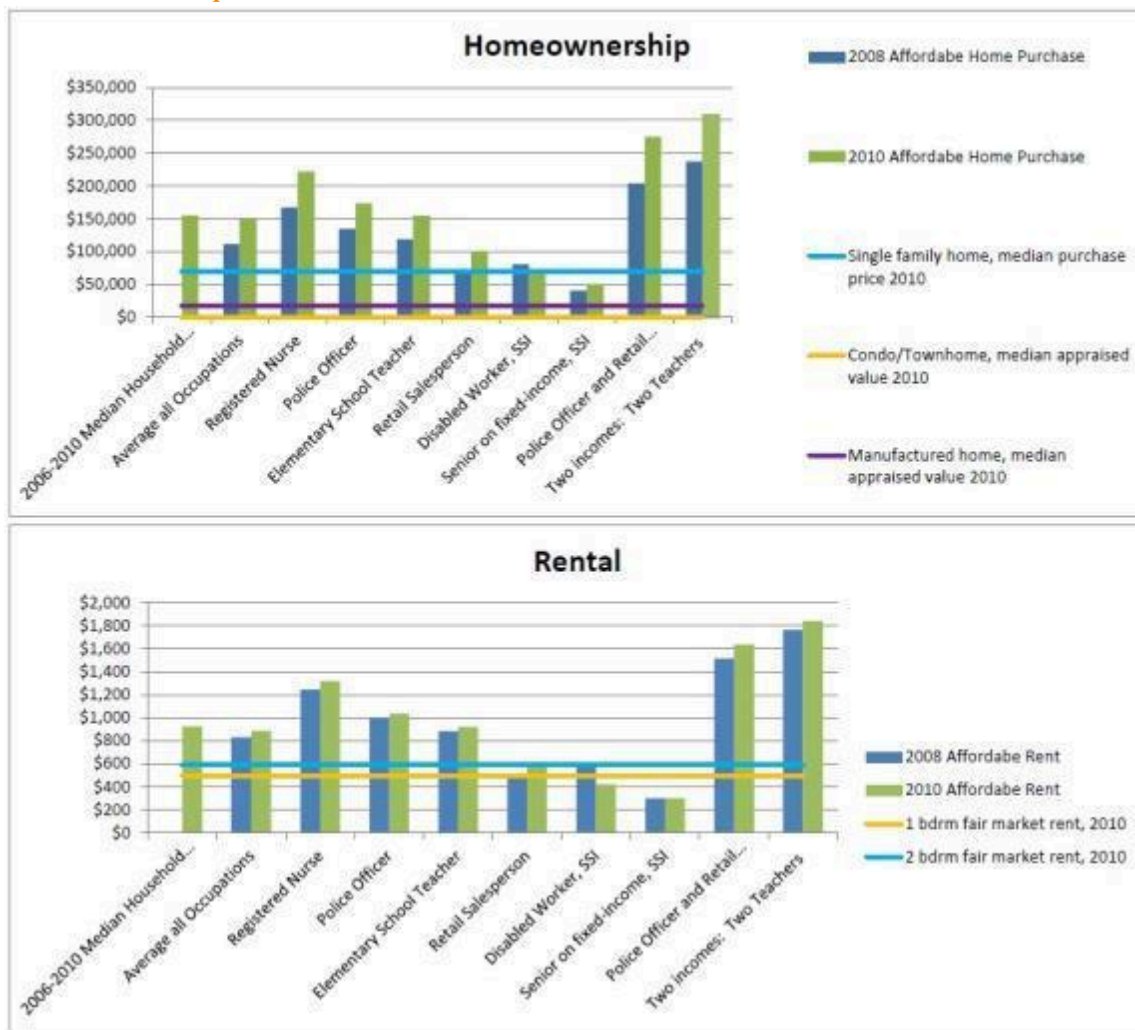
Decreased home ownership levels between 2000 and 2020 were a result of several factors in Montana, according to the Montana Board of Housing. “Although Montana’s foreclosure rate was about half of that of the nation, many areas, like Flathead County, suffered high foreclosure



rates. Tightened credit, along with increased underwriting criteria for mortgage loans that were put into effect nationwide after the housing bust, has also contributed to lower levels of homeownership rates in the State.”

Housing affordability is generally measured by the ratio of homeowner costs to total household income. Housing is considered to be “affordable” if homeowner costs, which include mortgage payments, real estate taxes, utilities, insurance, and various other fees, are less than 30% of the total household income. Affordable housing is often in the form of multi-family properties.

Figure 6. Homeownership



Petroleum County’s Median Household Income of \$40,000 reflects a 15.0% poverty level, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Town of Winnett has Median Household Income of \$35,250, which reflects a 11.4% poverty level. As of 2022, both the County and the Town have 40% and 60% of residents, respectively, that qualify as Low to Moderate Income according to the Montana Department of Commerce. Housing Choice Vouchers, which are distributed through the Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division, allow low income families to pay no



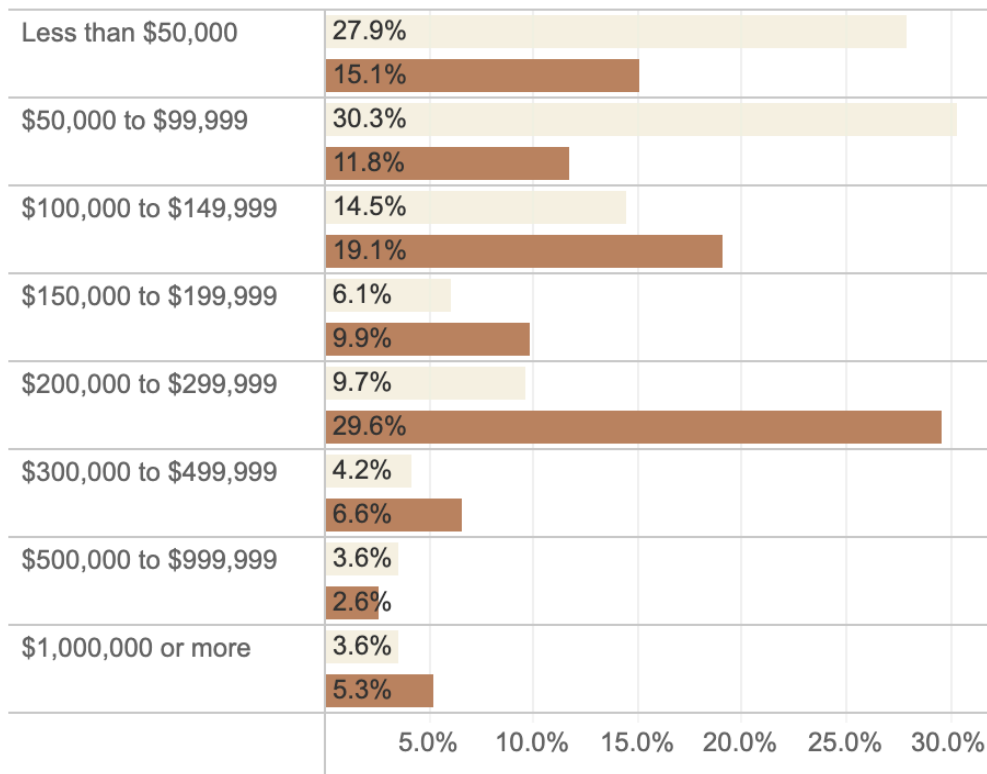
more than 30% of their income in rent, and disperses the remaining rent directly to the landlord. Currently, there are only six federally assisted rental units in Petroleum County.

According to the ACS, the median value of owner-occupied units in the County was \$155,700 in 2020, which is a 46% increase from 2010, when the median value was \$106,800. According to the American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Data Profile Housing Trend data, the following graphs display home values in Petroleum County & Winnett, respectively.

Figure 7. Home Values, Petroleum County & Winnett

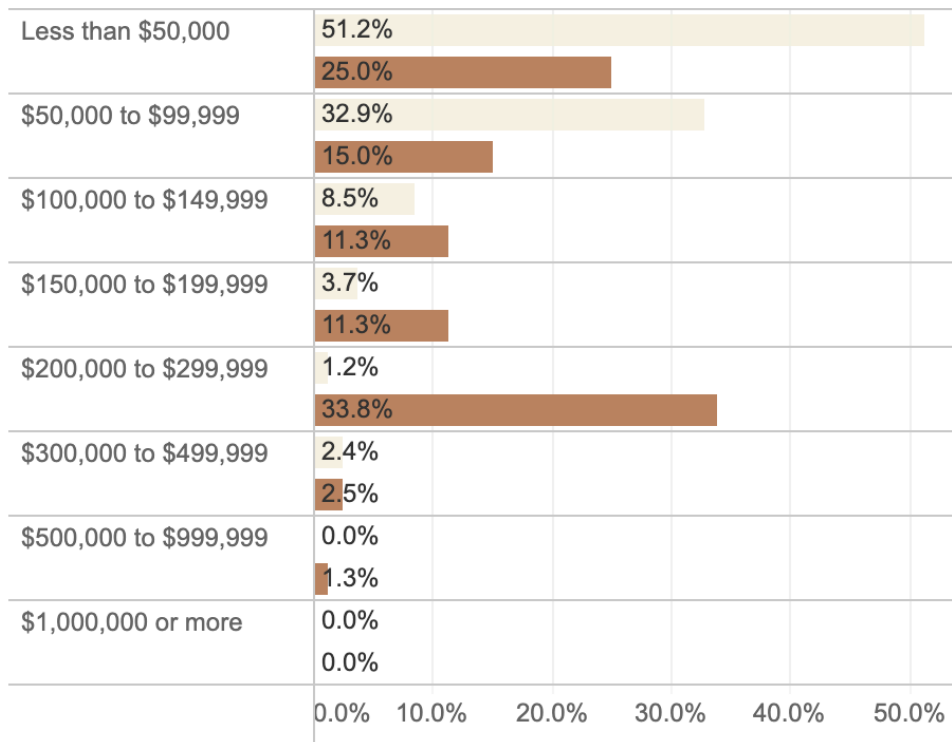
■ 2014
■ 2019

Percentage of Housing Units by House Value





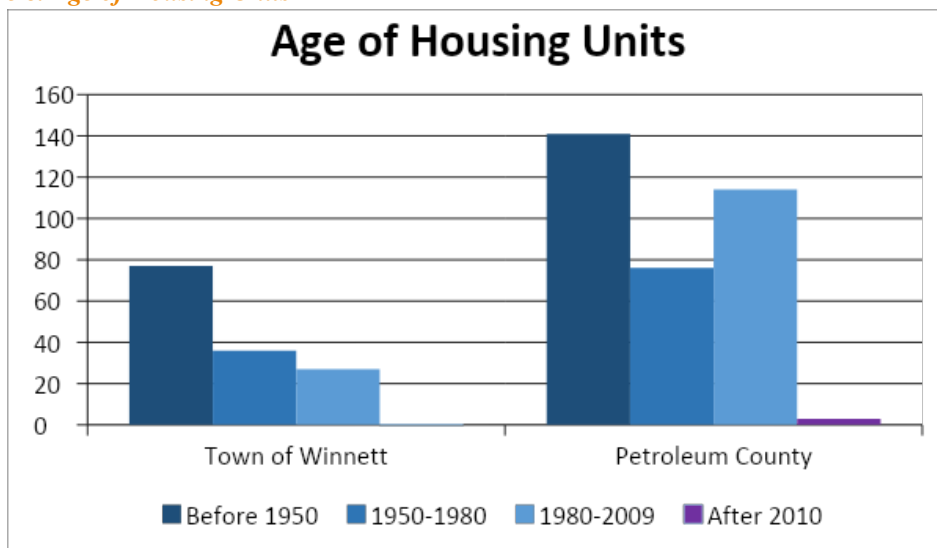
Percentage of Housing Units by House Value



Most of the County is rural in nature, and in general, consists of older housing which does not provide the same investment value as housing in larger cities and towns. According to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) written by Snowy Mountain Development Corporation in 2012, a major challenge in the general region surrounding Petroleum County is the deterioration of the aging housing stock. “Approximately 45% of the homes in the area were built prior to 1940, and many are in need of repair or improvements.” In addition, homes in rural communities typically need rehabilitation and retrofitting for energy efficiency. Petroleum County does not impose any building permit requirements other than those required by the State of Montana for the buildings erected in the County.



Figure 8. Age of Housing Units



5.2 Anticipated Future Housing Issues

Out-migration in the Central Montana Region has caused loss of young families and fewer children; however, longevity improved among older residents and rural counties, like Petroleum County, have high populations of seniors. That disparity is expected to increase in the coming years, and housing that supports the needs of seniors will be in demand.

In order to attract young individuals and families seeking to relocate or return to the area, there will be a need for quality, affordable housing; however, it must be noted that with an increase in senior or up-to-date housing that attracts population to the area, there needs to be corresponding improvement in services that support the health and well-being of that population group. This includes medical and emergency services, fire protection, and law enforcement. Many of these services are performed by local volunteers, which, in general, average over 45 years old. It is critical that younger members of the population become engaged in volunteering or it may become more difficult to staff emergency and fire protection service agencies.

Aging housing stock means homes in rural communities need rehabilitation and retrofitting for energy-efficiency. Furthermore, there is a lack of land or affordable lots suitable to support development of new housing where infrastructure is readily available in Winnett. These factors contribute to housing availability that is not desirable and, therefore, not conducive to growth.

Snowy Mountain Development Corporation (SMDC) provides homebuyer education and counseling for NeighborWorks Montana, which is designed to prepare first-time homebuyers for the issues that come with homeownership. The mission of NeighborWorks Montana is to create opportunities for families to live in affordable homes.

Other housing resources that would be available to residents of Petroleum County include:

- Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC):
 - o Federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) managed by MDOC



- CDBG Large-Scale Multi-Family Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
- CDBG Small-Scale Single-Family Housing Rehabilitation Grants
- o HOME grants – provided by HUD and MDOC
 - Homebuyer Assistance
 - Affordable Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
- o Housing Trust Fund – construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable rental housing for extremely low income families

5.3 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Meet housing needs for all age, income, and special needs groups.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Seek resources to improve housing quality, condition, and availability.
- ❖ Support efforts to build affordable homes and rentals.
- ❖ Support efforts to provide options for senior housing including housing efforts to keep medically fragile individuals in the community.
- ❖ Require universal design elements in housing assisted by federal or state resources.
- ❖ Seek assistance in incorporating accessibility in home design including retrofitting existing homes with ADA compliant features to help elderly or disabled residents remain in their home.
- ❖ Work with housing agencies and lenders to promote programs for home improvement and rehabilitation.
- ❖ Provide information about programs for low-income residents on loan and grant programs for home improvement.
- ❖ Encourage the compilation of a resource directory of weatherization programs and energy audits through the State, utility companies, and senior services.



6. Economic Development

6.1 Employment

Petroleum County's primary industry which employs the most individuals is agricultural production. According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture, the County had 104 farms, with 592,558 acres in farmland, a decrease of 14% from 689,752 acres in 2012. The market value of agricultural products sold totaled \$17,761,000, down 44% from 2012, when value of products was \$31,604,000, and government subsidies to farm operators funded an additional \$861,000. Government appropriations include such items as crop insurance premiums, and disaster, conservation, and commodity subsidies.

Other employers with more than just a few employees in the County include the School District, local government and local businesses. Farm and ranch and other seasonal businesses find it difficult to hire seasonal employees. The remoteness of the County, limited employment opportunities, goods and services all have an effect on the overall economy of the area.

Unemployment in the County is 2.3% as of June 2022, which is lower than the State unemployment rate of 2.6%. Although there are currently few businesses outside of agricultural production that require a labor force in the County, a lack of eligible workers for new businesses may be an issue.

Of the total County population of 519 residents, 263 are over the age of 16 and 257 are currently working. As of 2017, privately-employed workers make up 51% of the employed labor force, 27% are self-employed, and 22% are employed with the State, County, or Town government.

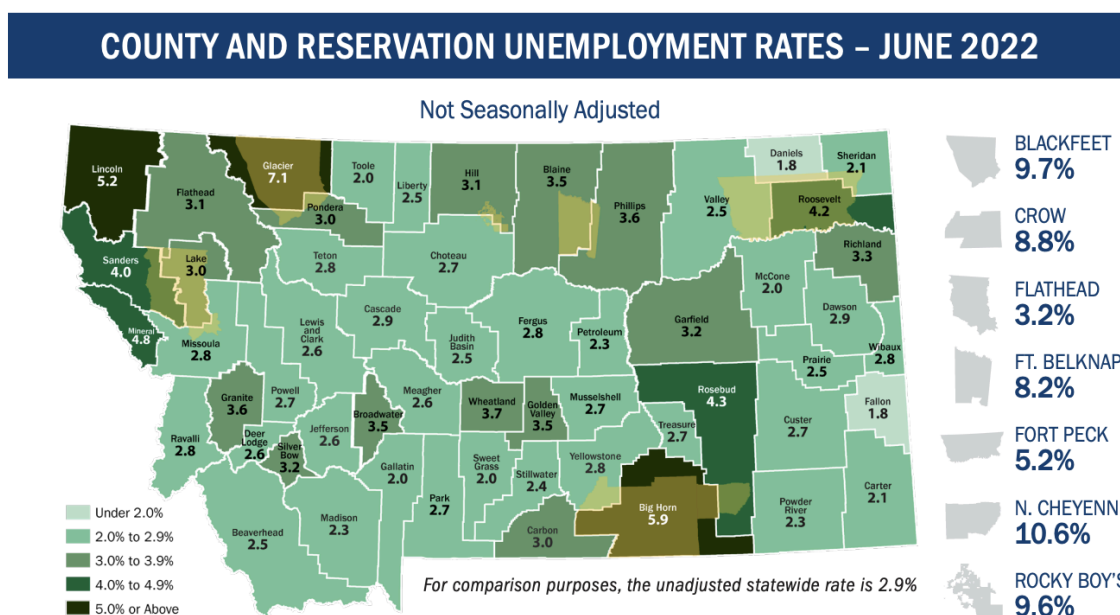
Table 2. Petroleum County Industries

Petroleum County Industries	
Agriculture	
Top Agriculture Producers, 2017	
Grains, Dry Beans and Dry Peas Sales (Dollars)	\$1,962,000
Additional Crop Sales (Dollars)	\$1,307,000
Top Livestock Producers, 2017	
Cattle, Including Calves Sales (Dollars)	\$14,346,000
Occupations, 2019	
Management, business, science, and arts	94
Sales and office	33
Farming, fishing & forestry (natural resources)	39
Education, instruction & library	15
Business & financial	9
Industries, 2019	
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	131



Retail Trade	24
Educational Services	22
Public Administration	14
Accommodation & Food Services	7
Employment Status	
Population 16 years and over	65.6%
Civilian labor force - Employed	257
Civilian labor force - Unemployed	6
Armed Forces	0
Not in labor force (2017 figure)	148
Females 16 years and over	63.9%

Figure 9. Montana County and Reservation Unemployment Rates



6.2 Income

The Montana Department of Commerce Census and Economic Information Center reports median household income as of 2019 in Petroleum County is \$51,250. Income for County residents fluctuates with agricultural markets.

An average of 15.0% of the population has income below poverty level, although 10.0% of children under the age of 18 are considered in poverty, according to the 2019 ACS.



Table 3. Petroleum County Median Income, 2017

Petroleum County Income and Benefits	
Mean earnings (dollars)	\$47,344
Mean Social Security income (dollars)	\$13,731
Mean retirement income (dollars)	\$14,197
Mean Supplemental Security Income (dollars)	\$0
Mean cash public assistance income (dollars)	\$4,900
Median family income (dollars)	\$49,107
Mean family income (dollars)	\$57,038

6.3 Future Projections for Economic Development

Declining population in Petroleum County is likely attributable to mechanization and consolidation of agricultural activities. This has resulted in a loss of jobs, which caused workers and young people to move away from their small hometowns in search of employment and education. Urban areas and urban-adjacent non-metro counties in the region have been growing due to in-migration. It is not anticipated that this trend will change significantly in the future.

The county does not have enough jobs to provide for young families; consequently the senior population continues to grow disproportionately, school enrollment is declining, and local businesses have fewer customers. County residents would like to see a stronger economy, preferably based on local agriculture, the attraction of new industry, and opportunities for tourism. Some of the jobs available, generally part time, seasonal and low paying cannot be filled. Promoting the opportunity to enjoy a rural lifestyle while still earning good wages could attract telecommuters to the community. This might be particularly true for information technology experts who can perform their job remotely.

There is very little opportunity in the County for natural resource extraction and the employment opportunities that industry might provide. Gravel resources may provide some economic values. Alternative energy resources like wind are also not a likely source of economic development. Wind energy projects are developed by companies that seek out the areas with the strongest wind resource but also review other critical factors like access to land, access to the transmission lines, ability to sell the electricity, and public engagement other significant development factors.



Figure 10. Montana Wind Power

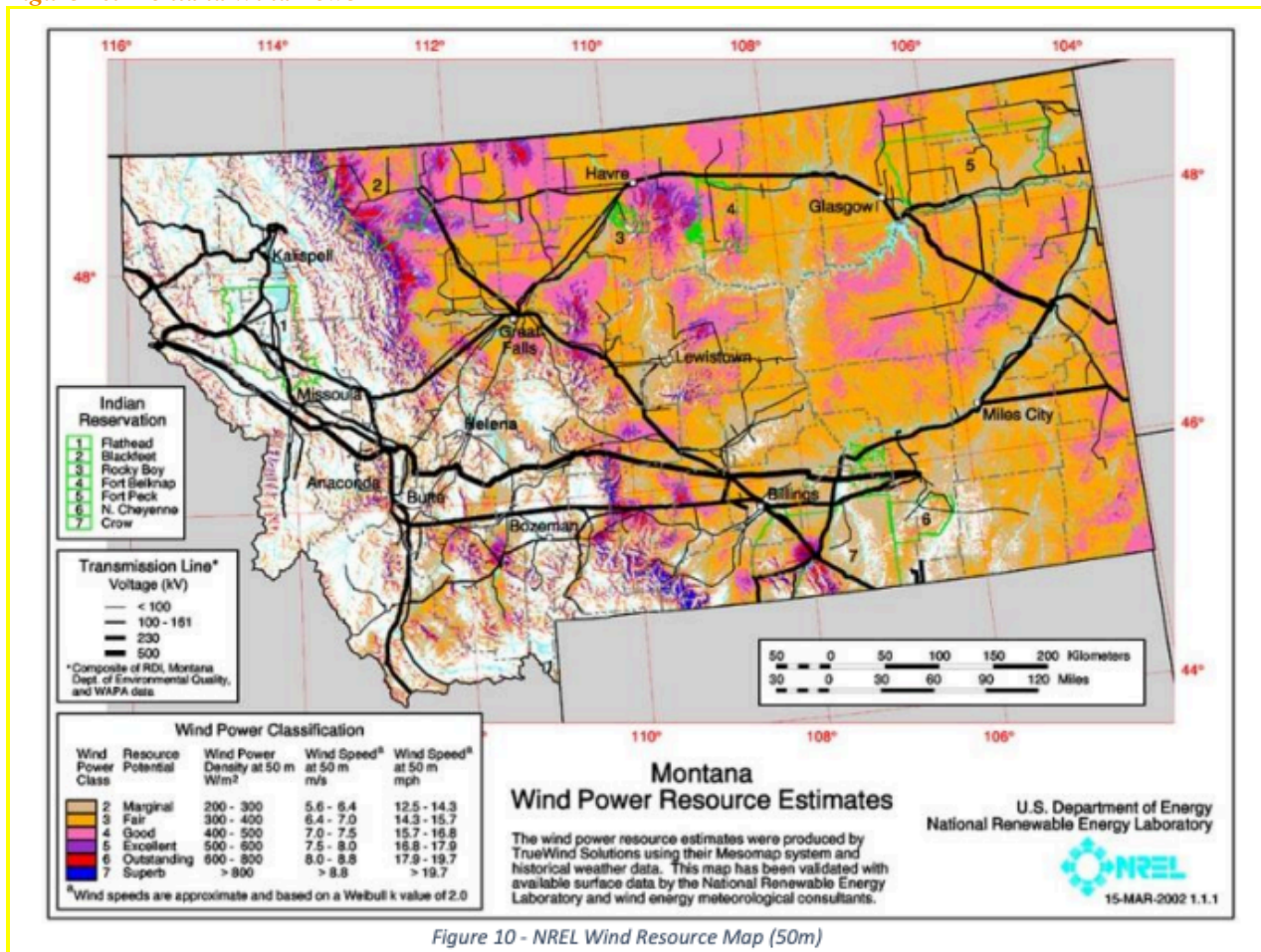


Figure 10 - NREL Wind Resource Map (50m)

Due to the lack of population, industry, and employment it is critical that the County, which has a large amount of state and federal land in its land base, continues to receive Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT). This form of payment from the Federal government that takes the place of full tax payment is subject to congressional approval. Failure of this program without a viable replacement would be devastating to the operation of Petroleum County government. The formula for calculating a county's PILT payment is also in need of revision as the payment for an acre of federal ground in Petroleum County is significantly less than the annual tax payment that would be received on an acre of private ground of similar assessed value. This denies the county tens of thousands of dollars each year that they would have seen if the acres were privately owned and taxed.

6.4 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Encourage retention of wage earners in the County.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Identify economic development activities that encourage local job creation.



- ❖ County and Town governments collaborate to support economic development projects including infrastructure, community amenities and housing for workforce.
- ❖ Encourage business retention and expansion by identifying business needs and supporting “buy-local” programs.
- ❖ Maintain County and Town budgets at a level that will support infrastructure such as water, sewer, roads and bridges and that maintains a safe, healthy, and attractive environment such as fire and police protection and weed management.

GOAL

Provide for diversification and broadening of the economy.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Support the development of markets for new and existing agricultural businesses, including agritourism and ecotourism opportunities, as well as other potential businesses.
- ❖ Support increased resources for agricultural research that supports growth of agribusinesses and improves competitiveness of growers.
- ❖ Create and market a business climate that would attract home businesses and telecommuters. Promote the area’s solitude, family-friendly atmosphere, beauty, and recreational opportunities that might attract non-traditional wage earners to move to the area.
- ❖ Support expanded broadband and cellular service infrastructure within the County.
- ❖ Support new and expanding means of employment to include small scale economic development activities.
- ❖ Seek local Montana Job Service presence to fill existing seasonal and full time jobs and/or provide education on jobs that could be performed remotely.
- ❖ Support efforts to offer workforce training.
- ❖ Promote opportunities for economic development based on recreational activities.



❖

Petroleum County’s Big Sky of sunrises, sunsets, northern lights, star gazing, and summer storm clouds are an attraction to visitors who bring revenue to local businesses



7. Local Services

7.1 Fire Protection

Fire protection within Petroleum County is primarily provided by the Winnett Volunteer Fire Department. The Department's station is located in Winnett and has 24 volunteer firefighters. In addition to the equipment and resources available from this service unit, Petroleum County has support equipment available.



In 1985, Petroleum County entered into the State/County Cooperative Fire program with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), in which the State signed an agreement with the County to provide support in the matters of organization, planning, equipment, prevention, training, and fire suppression support.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Central Montana Fire Zone has fire protection responsibility for 3.5 million acres of land within their coverage area. In addition, they provide assistance to other agencies during the fire season, such as USDA Forest Service, Montana DNRC, and the counties within the zone.

In addition, the County has mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties, BLM, and State Lands, as well as a verbal agreement with the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. There is a Petroleum County Cooperative Fire Management Plan.

In 2004 the County, assisted by Snowy Mountain Development Corporation, developed and adopted a Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan in an attempt to reduce the potential for wildfires that may threaten population, structures, infrastructure, and ecosystems in the County.

7.2 Law Enforcement

Law enforcement services in Petroleum County are limited to the Petroleum County Sheriff's Department, which is located in the town of Winnett. At this time, the Sheriff's Department employs a full-time Sheriff, a full-time Deputy Sheriff, and four volunteer Sheriff's reserve officers. The Sheriff's Department is located in the County Courthouse. There is no jail located within Petroleum County; therefore, jail facilities in Lewistown serve the County.

The County does not have a full time County Attorney, but utilizes the Fergus County Attorney when needed. The County also employs one Justice of the Peace.

7.3 Disaster Emergency Services

Petroleum County has a part-time Disaster Emergency Services (DES) coordinator, located in the County Courthouse. The DES coordinator serves as a point of contact for all matters involving state assistance with Emergency Management. An Emergency Operations Plan has been developed by the County in cooperation with the Town of Winnett.



The Petroleum County Emergency Operations Plan establishes the concept of operations and primary functions for managing disasters and emergencies in Petroleum County, Montana including the Town of Winnett. This plan provides an overview of the Petroleum County approach to emergency operations and serves as the foundation for standard operating procedures and other agency documents.

Through a cooperative agreement between the counties, Fergus County Sheriff's office operates the 911 dispatch for Petroleum County, which includes law enforcement, emergency medical calls, and fire calls.

7.4 Public Health

Petroleum County is part of the Central Montana Health District, which serves five counties in Central Montana. The main office for the Health District is located in Lewistown. Services offered include Immunization and Maternal Child Health, Communicable Disease Prevention, and Comprehensive Cancer Control. The County Sanitarian is also located in this office. The Central Montana Health District also regularly sends medical personnel to Winnett to do checkups on children and senior citizens.

In addition, the Central Montana Medical Center and the Central Montana Community Health Center, both located in Lewistown, provide a full range of medical services to the surrounding communities. Citizens of Winnett and Petroleum County often utilize public health facilities in Roundup, Billings and Jordan as well.

Using Covid funding a Tele health room has been set up in the basement of the county courthouse. The room, which can be used by all county residents but was built with senior citizens in mind, is set up with all necessary video chat technology and soundproof walls to help insure patient privacy. A local EMT, who shall remain unnamed and awesome, volunteers time to help patients use the equipment in the room. When the Petroleum County Community Center is finished, this service will be transferred to a room in their building, which may also be used for in person check ups.

Ambulance services respond to medical emergencies in Petroleum County. Ambulance services are provided by Petroleum County Ambulance volunteers, who are responsible for a 1,500 square-mile service area.

The South Central Regional Mental Health Center operates in eleven (11) counties within Montana, including Petroleum County. It is a registered non-profit corporation dedicated to mental health and chemical dependency care in the area.

7.5 Social Services

Social services in Petroleum County are provided by the Central Montana Health District, as well as the Central Montana Medical Center and the Central Montana Community Health Center. All facilities are located in Lewistown.

Senior citizens in Petroleum County are supported by the Area II Agency on Aging, which serves a total of eleven Montana counties. Some services provided include home and community



based services, state health insurance counseling, senior advocate, and the aging and disability resource center.

Other than telehealth, there are currently no medical services other than County and volunteer staffed emergency services in the County. Residents of the County must travel to other urban centers (Lewistown, Roundup and Billings are the closest) for medical care including pharmacy services.

7.6 Education

There is currently one public school in Petroleum County, serving approximately 62 students in elementary and secondary grades (K-12). The school is located in Winnett. There are no post-secondary education facilities within the county. Student enrollment in the County appears to be at a steady decline in enrollment. The high school graduation rate in the County is approximately 96.6%, which is significantly higher than the state average of 86%.

7.7 Noxious Weed Management

The Petroleum County Weed District's goals are to:

1. Bring together those responsible for weed management within Petroleum County.
2. Improve common management objectives.
3. Facilitate effective treatment and proficiency efforts along geographic boundaries with similar land types.
4. Understand and eradicate problem species.
5. Encourage landowners to contact the weed department for weed control.

The District cooperates with private landowners, county government, state agencies, federal land management agencies, other interested agencies and individuals to help assist with control of noxious weeds and provide education on weed management.

7.8 Land Conservation

The Petroleum County Conservation District is a board of five county elected officials and two appointed city officials tasked with the conservation of the county's natural resources. Through education, outreach and program and project development the District works hard to put local common sense natural resource conservation on the ground and to educate the current and future producers and landowners on natural resource conservation all while helping them to continue sustainability in their businesses. It regularly partners with other conservation districts, watershed groups, stakeholder groups, state and federal agencies, as well as some NGO's and nonprofits to put conservation on-the-ground.

7.9 Communications

Mid-Rivers Communications is the local carrier providing communication service to Petroleum County. In addition to local phone service, Mid-Rivers provides high speed internet and cellular telephone service. Cell service within the county is spotty at best but has improved vastly in the past decade. Verizon service also works within the county. Most rural residents are dependent on satellite service for television. Mid-Rivers has now provided fiber optic service to the town



of Winnett, which includes the school, and to the north end of the county. It is expected to be 2030 before all the rural residents are expected to receive fiber optic service.

7.10 Future Need for Additional or Improved Services

It is anticipated that 28.5% of the population in Petroleum County is 65 years of age and older, indicating the demand for public health and social services will continue to increase. Concern that an increased population that is aging would put additional stress on medical, emergency, and law enforcement services, a balanced approach to improving these services needs to be considered before it is crucial.

7.11 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Promote public health and social services in Petroleum County and the Town of Winnett to serve the needs of the citizens.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Investigate opportunities and develop ways to provide primary medical services for residents of the County. Support visiting medical programs.
- ❖ Identify incentives that could be provided to medical professionals as a way to draw them to the County.
- ❖ Endorse a community paramedics training program.
- ❖ Seek health care services to serve elderly residents locally rather than forcing individuals in need of care to move to surrounding cities.

GOAL

Provide adequate emergency services in Petroleum County and the Town of Winnett.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Encourage volunteers for fire and emergency services.
- ❖ Encourage community involvement in supporting emergency services provided by the Petroleum County Ambulance and Fire Department.
- ❖ Consider costs of emergency services and protection when considering new developments (i.e. subdivisions).

GOAL

Provide for the public service needs of the community at reasonable and acceptable cost to the taxpayers.

OBJECTIVES

Maintain County and Town budgets at a level that will support local services such as emergency services, law enforcement, weed management, social services, and education that maintains a safe and healthy environment for residents without an excessive tax burden.

GOAL

Reliable high speed internet for all residents of Petroleum County.

OBJECTIVES

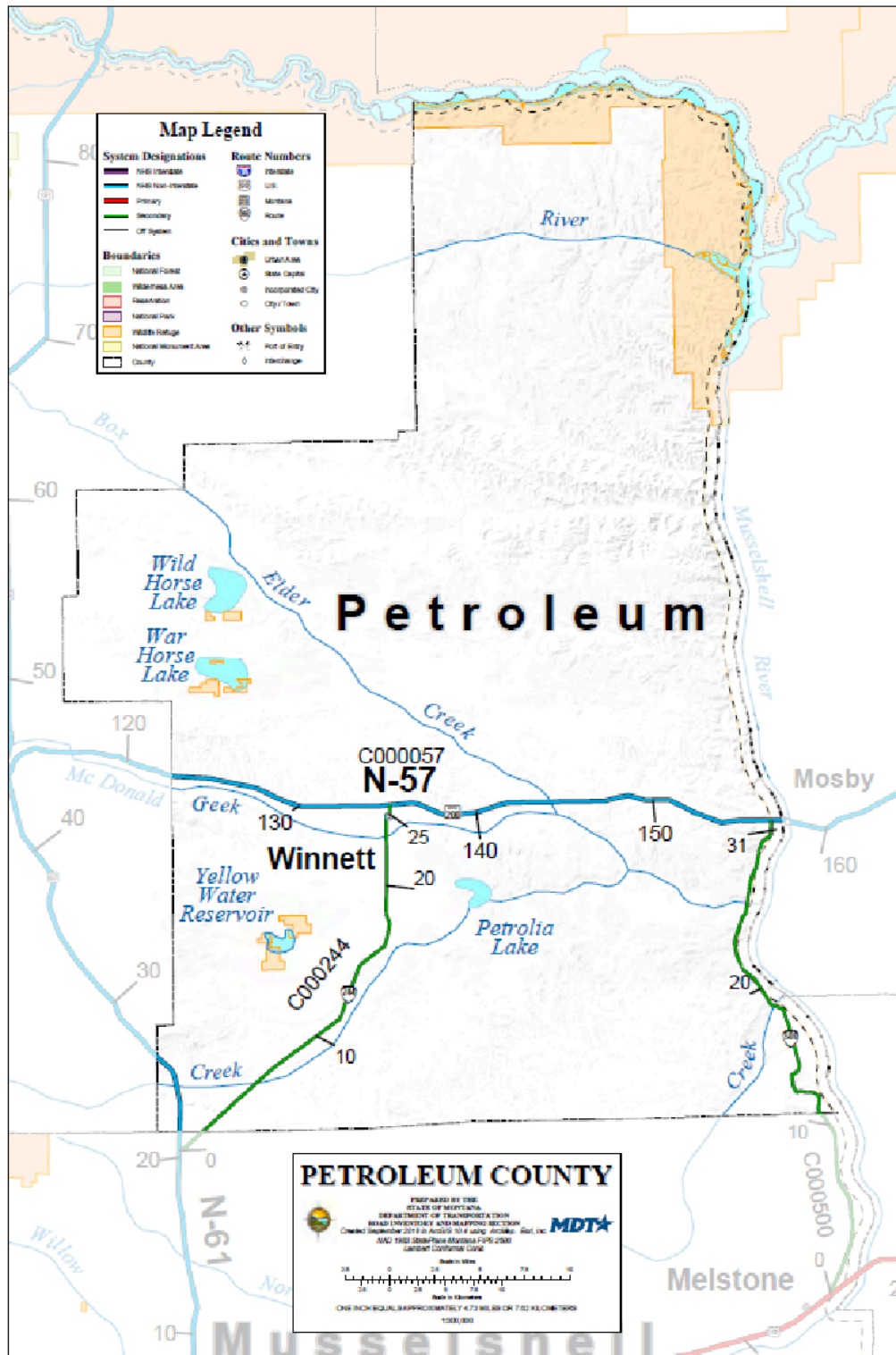
Work with officials from state and federal agencies to encourage legislation to provide faster speed at affordable rates to those in both the municipal and rural parts of the County.



8. Public Facilities

8.1 Transportation

Figure 11. MDT-Petroleum County





Petroleum County transportation facilities consist of an extensive network of roads and bridges, in addition to a local airport facility, which is discussed in further detail below.

The road system within the county consists of approximately 52 miles of on-system State of Montana maintained highways, in addition to secondary routes and 585 miles of local county roads that are the maintenance responsibility of the Petroleum County Road Department.

Petroleum County currently has 24 bridges over 20' that are inspected biennially by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Although the bridges are inspected by MDT, the structures located on local county roads remain the fiscal responsibility of the County, both for inspection and maintenance. Many of our bridges and their supporting infrastructure are starting to age and will be in need of more maintenance in the next five years.

The MDT Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for 2022-2026 lists the following project in the Right of Way and Incidental Construction Phase:

- Main Street-Winnett – Reconstruction of approximately 0.84 miles of Secondary 244.

8.2 Water Supply

The Musselshell River runs along the eastern border of the County and Fort Peck Reservoir on the Missouri River runs along the north boundary of the County. Lakes and storage reservoirs located in the County include Petrolia Lake, Yellow Water Reservoir, War Horse Lake, and Wild Horse Lake. Flatwillow Creek, Boxelder Creek, and McDonald Creek are three primary creeks that typically run year around providing irrigation and stock water. Seasonal creeks include Pike Creek, Blood Creek, Yellow Water Creek, and Elk Creek.

Petroleum County currently has one public water system in the Town of Winnett, as indicated by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The system is a community system, sourced primarily from groundwater, and serves approximately 187 individuals.

Statistics from the Ground Water Information Center of the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology indicate 674 total wells in Petroleum County, with 127 being for domestic use. In Montana, most individual wells are not required to be filed with the state, although that may change in the future depending on state legislative issues. To assure a water right, filing with the state is necessary.



Table 4. Petroleum County New Wells

County Well Data per Year (New Wells Only)	Number
2022	5
2021	4
2020	6
2019	6
2018	4
2017*	7
2015	2
2014	3
2013	5
2012	6
2009	18
2008	4
2007	6
2006	1
2005	5
2004	6
2003	3
2002	60
2001	16
2000	8
1999	4
1998	10

* Data not available for 2016

Type of Well	Number
Unknown	8
Waterflood	48
Industrial	48
Public Water Supply	5
Test Well	1
Unused	3
Monitoring	102
Irrigation	38
Geotech	2
Stock Water	408
Domestic	127
Total*	790
*Number may be different from County total since one well may have several reported water uses.	

Table 5. Petroleum County Well Usage



8.3 WasteWater Treatment

The Town of Winnett is responsible for an aerated, three-cell lagoon system which discharges from the facility into McDonald Creek. The current wastewater system is scheduled for improvements in the next two years. Individual county residents with septic systems are permitted by Montana DEQ and/or the County Sanitarian.

8.4 Courthouse

The building that currently acts as the Petroleum County Courthouse was constructed in 1916-1917, and was originally occupied by a number of local businesses. In 1930, the building was remodeled as the courthouse, and in 1943 the County purchased the building from the estate of the original owner. The building is currently in a state of slight disrepair with a growing list of deferred maintenance to be addressed at a future date. The vacant and underutilized space in the Courthouse presents an opportunity to potentially meet community needs and create a revenue stream for the County to help offset building maintenance costs.

8.5 Fire Hall/EMS/Town Hall

Winnett maintains a Town Hall / Emergency Services Building which was built in the mid 1980's. This new building is located in the center of town and houses the equipment for the ambulance service as well as the fire department service. The Winnett city office is also housed in the building along with the local weed board. It has a large meeting room used by the various services and the city council for monthly meetings.

Fire protection within Petroleum County is primarily provided by the Winnett Volunteer Fire Department. The Department's station is located in Winnett. In addition to the equipment and resources available from this service unit, Petroleum County has support equipment available.

8.6 Airport

Petroleum County is home to the Winnett Airport, located two miles southwest of Winnett. The airport consists of a 3,130-ft long turf runway, and is publicly owned and maintained by Petroleum County. There are approximately 130 aircraft operations per year, 77% local general aviation and 23% transient general aviation. The airport is unattended and open to the public.

The current aviation uses of the airport include, but are not limited to:

- Crop dusting
- Grasshopper control
- Predator control
- Game counting
- Livestock management
- Potential new pilots (flight training)
- Emergency medical



8.7 Cemetery

There are numerous cemeteries scattered about Petroleum County that document the history of the settlement of the region with the names of many of the earliest residents as well as multiple generations of families that lived their lives in the community in the past 100 plus years. Many of the homesteader cemeteries are now nothing more than small fenced off parcels of land at the edge of a field or pasture and are only visited by the descendants who have returned to learn of their ancestors. Some are simply family or neighborhood cemeteries such as the Shay Cemetery, Ashley Cemetery or the Cat Creek Cemetery. The Flatwillow Cemetery is one of the oldest in the community while the Winnett Cemetery is the largest cemetery in the community. Both of those cemeteries are still maintained by local volunteers and governed by boards that were established in the early 1900's.

8.8 County/Town Shops

The Town of Winnett and Petroleum County each have an equipment shop.

8.9 Refuse Site

Petroleum County's refuse site was closed in the mid-1990's. Residents currently get garbage service from Lewistown.

8.10 Library

The Petroleum County Community Library, located in Winnett, was formally established in 1958, and became a county library with a tax base, an appointed board of trustees, and improved resources. In 1974, the library became the first combined elementary/high school/public library in the state, and has been in operation since that time.

The Library currently has a Director, Library Assistant, Story Hour Instructor, and History Committee, as well as a Board of Trustees and a number of volunteers.

8.11 Community Senior Centers

A Petroleum County seniors' organization was formed several years ago and is a project of the Area II Agency on Aging which has an office in Roundup, Montana. The local group has a board that meets regularly as well as with other county boards to conduct business. Some Federal and State funding is available to underwrite the meals and activities of the county organizations. The primary activity in Petroleum County is providing meals every Thursday at noon at a very reasonable price. Once a month, prior to the meals, blood pressure testing is available and seasonally Flu Shots are provided. This all occurs in the Senior Center which is in the basement of the county courthouse. The seniors also use the Center for card playing and special programs. The new Petroleum County Community Center, due to be completed in late 2022 / early 2023, may have the capacity to accommodate future growth and needs for the seniors spatially and programmatically. This single-level space would be more physically feasible to serve the needs of our community's senior population.



8.12 Petroleum County Community Center

In August of 2017, a volunteer committee formed with the dream of building the Petroleum County Community Center (PCCC). Soon after, PCCC established an account with the Petroleum County Endowment under the Central Montana Foundation umbrella, where donors could give tax deductible donations. While they began raising money for the center, the community was surveyed for what they wanted in the center, land parcels were donated and purchased for the building site, and PCCC received a planning grant for preliminary architectural work.

The PCCC committee shared their vision at the 2019 Winnett All-Class Reunion. Larry Carrell, a 1958 graduate of Winnett High School, was in attendance and told PCCC committee members he was interested in the project and would like to meet with them. The committee had no idea Larry and his wife, Kathi, were planning to donate \$5 million to the project (a donation of \$4.5 million, along with a dollar-for-dollar match of \$500,000). The total would provide funds for building the community center, as well as funds for a permanent endowment for PCCC to maintain the structure. Soon after the committee was informed of the Carrell donation, they started the process of becoming a 501(c)(3).

Early in 2021, PCCC received \$1.6 million from the Bruno and Evelyne Hill Betti Foundation to fund the Betti Foundation Youth Program. This gift provided startup funding and an endowment for long-term sustainability. A part time director for the Betti Youth Program was hired, as well as a part time director for PCCC. The Betti Youth Program started in September of 2021. Later that year the Betti Foundation donated another \$1.41 million for an endowment for the community center.



Groundbreaking for the Community Center, November 8, 2021. PCCC benefactor Larry Carrell (4th from right). Joan Murphy representing the Youth Program benefactor Betti Foundation (center). Board members Brenda Brady, LuAnn Knutson, Sue McKenna, Gari King, Brandi Lang. Construction manager Cole Romans, Architects Kelly Axtman and Scott Cromwell.



PCCC has three different size meeting rooms: the Rebecca Room is the smallest, and houses the Betti Youth Program, as well as smaller group meetings; the Wesley room provides a space for the Senior Citizens to meet every Thursday, and is a great area for meetings and potluck gatherings; the Carrell Hall has a stage, and can be used for large meetings, weddings, funerals, reunions, gym activities, and many other purposes.

The office suite consists of the PCCC office, a medical office, rental office, and restroom. PCCC's kitchen serves events in the building, as well as those needing a commercial kitchen to rent. Another feature of the community center is the Heritage Wall; a space for locals and visitors to learn about and share history of our community.

Petroleum County Community Center strives to provide and maintain a gathering place for present and future generations. The facility is available for cultural, social, economic, educational, and recreational events. PCCC endeavors to create a space that feels welcoming, safe, and accessible.

8.13 Future Need for Additional or Improved Facilities

It is estimated that 28.5% of the population in Petroleum County is 65 years of age and older, indicating that the demand for community senior centers and ADA compliant facilities will continue to increase.

According to results obtained from the public survey taken in conjunction with development of this Growth Policy, the facilities noted as most important for the County/Town to maintain were roads/streets, bridges, the courthouse/senior center, the library, the town hall, and the emergency services hall.

Based on the survey and community discussions, additional facilities benefitting the area could be a refuse site and a community center that allows for multiple uses such as a clinic, daycare, or museum.

Also, based on community feedback, potential future uses of the airport could expand to also include:

- Fire
- Emergency
- Corporate
- Hunters
- Regional and Nationwide Recreationalists
- Flight Training Schools

In order to accommodate growth and potential uses, the airport will need improvements to the runway, the addition of fuel service, and possible accommodations. A relocation of the airport might be considered to meet future needs.



8.14 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Systematically plan and budget for capital improvements within the Town and County to efficiently maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Prepare and utilize Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plans (CCIP) for Petroleum County and the Town of Winnett.
- ❖ Continue to update CCIP annually as County/Town needs change.
- ❖ Support upgrades of public facilities for ADA compliance. Investigate opportunities for assistance for private upgrades.
- ❖ Support the Town of Winnett in their efforts to plan, fund, and build water, sewer, roads, and utilities through state and federal funding mechanisms.
- ❖ Encourage leveraging additional resources for infrastructure through private/public partnerships.
- ❖ Consider policies that require developers to pay a proportional share for infrastructure upgrades and expansion.
- ❖ Consider upgrades to the airport infrastructure to accommodate growth and meet future needs.

GOAL

Maintain the existing County roads and bridges efficiently, economically, and based on standard criteria.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Follow the recommendations for maintenance and improvements to the County transportation system outlined in the CCIP.
- ❖ Encourage securing financial assistance as available from programs that may help leverage local funds in the maintenance of County roads and bridges (i.e. TSEP, FLAP, TA, etc.)
- ❖ Work with state and federal agencies to improve road conditions affected by use due to public lands access.
- ❖ Encourage County staff and officials to communicate with MDT personnel on a regular basis in order to take advantage of MDT road, bridge, and transportation alternative programs.
- ❖ Stay apprised of funding opportunities.



9. Natural Resources

9.1 Land Cover

Petroleum County consists mainly of grassland, floodplain, and outcrops of small rock formations in addition to the expansive agricultural land. The Missouri Breaks have a large presence in Petroleum County. The Breaks are a vast area of rolling hills, buttes, rock outcroppings, scattered forests and massive prairie flats that surround the Missouri River. Although the Missouri Breaks has no clearly defined border it is an area that generally lies to the east of Fort Benton, to the north of Winnett and to the south and west of Fort Peck Lake. Much of the Missouri Breaks area is completely uninhabited as it lies within the Charles Russell Wildlife Refuge.



9.2 Rivers, Streams, Lakes, Wetlands, and Watersheds

The Musselshell River runs along the eastern border of the County and Fort Peck Reservoir runs along the north boundary of the County. Other lakes located in the County include Petrolia Lake, War Horse Lake, Wild Horse Lake, and Yellow Water Reservoir. Flatwillow Creek, Elk Creek, McDonald Creek, Box Elder Creek are primary creeks that typically run year around providing irrigation and stock water.

9.3 Fish and Wildlife

Fish and wildlife are abundant in the County and consist mainly of white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, elk, as well as pheasants, sage grouse, other wild game birds, and songbirds.

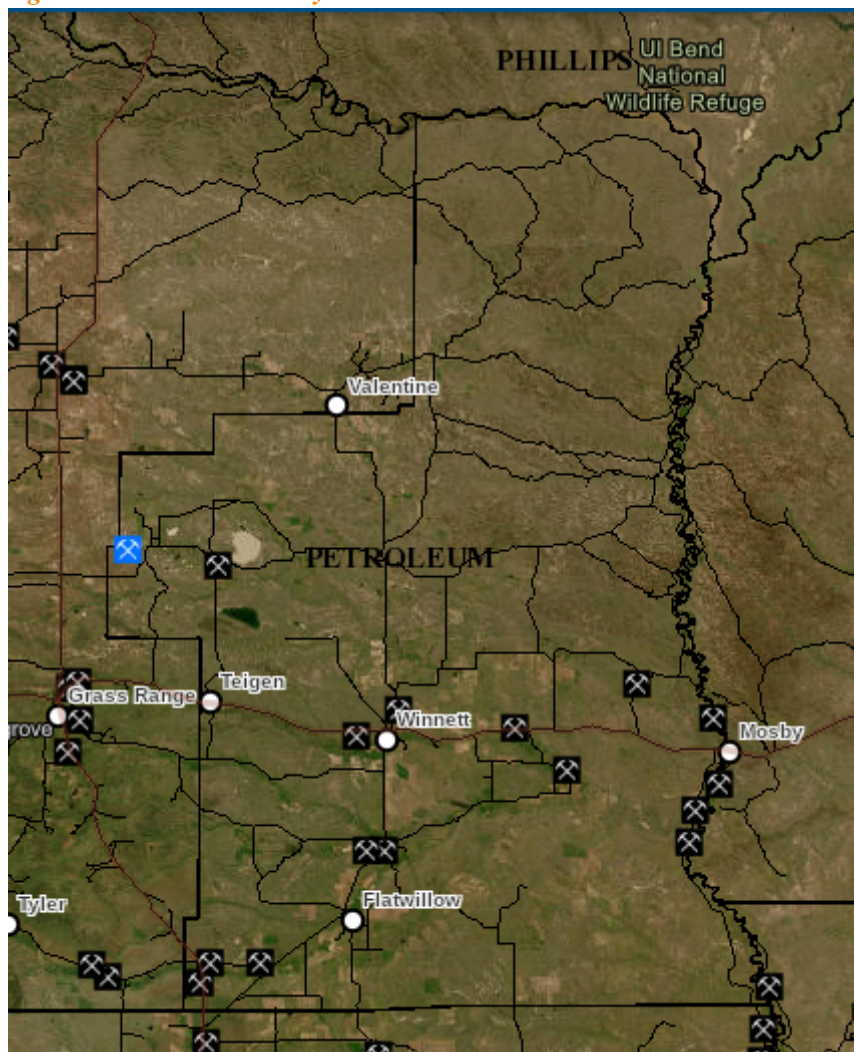
9.4 Sand and Gravel Resources

There are 16 permitted open-cut mine and gravel sites located within the County. Nine are



permitted by the county road crew and seven are privately permitted. A map detailing the location of the sites is shown below in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Petroleum County Gravel Sites



9.5 Wildland-Urban Interface

In 2004, Petroleum, Judith Basin, and Fergus Counties in conjunction with Snowy Mountain Development created a Wildland Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan. According to the plan, approximately 75% of all fires in Petroleum County since 1980 have been ignited by nature. The rate of human-ignited fires is below both the state and national averages. The County's low population as well as agrarian economy and wildfire educated residents all contribute to this low percentage.

The majority of the fire-prone landscape in the County is along the northeastern portion. The plan stated four basic opportunities to reduce the loss of life and structures to wildfire including prevention, education, readiness, and adopting building codes.

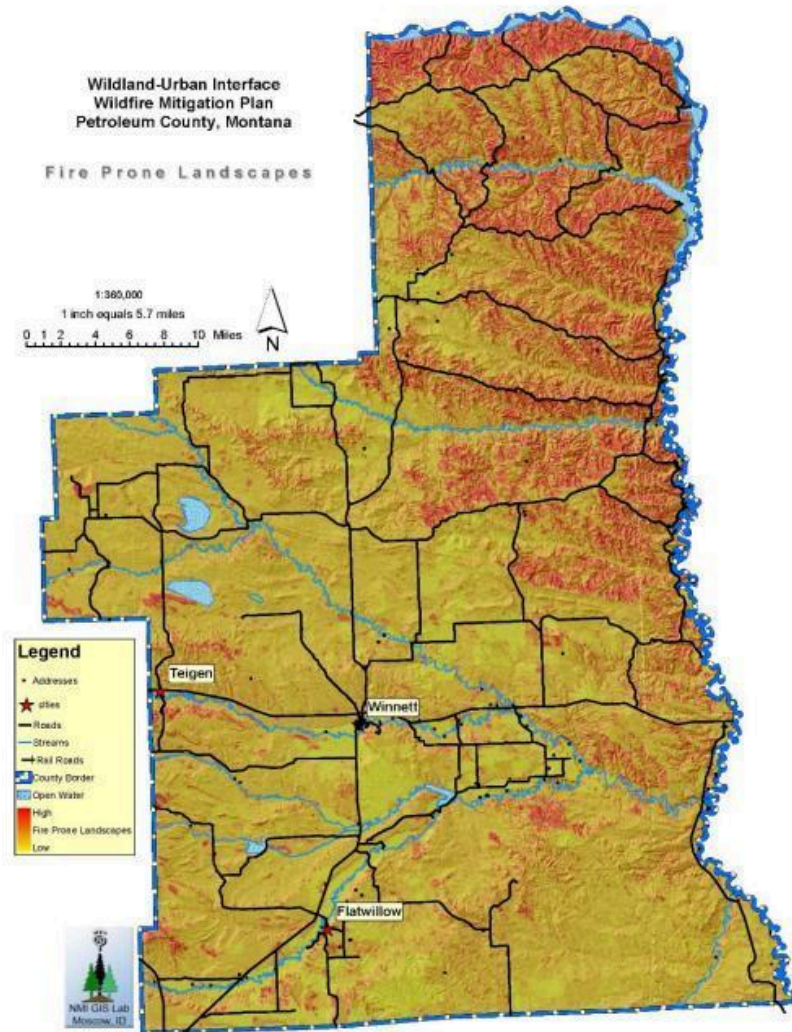


Figure 13. Wildland-Urban Interface

9.6 Mining

A primarily copper mining prospect called Annie Laurie is located in the Northeast part of the County.



9.7 Energy

The County has 2 currently producing oil well operators, 8 currently producing oil leases on file (2017 data for leases), and 9 producing oil wells on file. The total number of wells on file is 717. The total number of barrels of oil produced in 2020 was 12,680 and the MCF of gas produced in the year was 0, according to the Montana Board of Oil & Gas Conservation.

9.8 Climate and Soils

Petroleum County gets an average of 13 inches of total precipitation. There are approximately 201 sunny days with a July average high of 87 degrees Fahrenheit and a January average low of 9 degrees Fahrenheit.

Geologically, the County contains a petroleum-bearing anticline which divides the County into two regions. Hill Creek formation and Bear Paw shale make up the northern half while older cretaceous rocks make up the southern half.

9.9 Future Projections

Future projections for the County and Town are not anticipated to change from their current state. The County does not anticipate an influx of mining or alternative energy production at this time; however it is possible that potential oil and gas energy production increases over the next five years.

9.10 Goals and Objectives

Goal

Provide for long term function of natural systems and resources, recognizing a diversity of uses for those systems and resources.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Collaborate and coordinate with state and federal agencies to share GIS data collected on Petroleum County lands and water.
- ❖ Update subdivision regulations to include current legislative changes in order to mitigate impacts on the natural environment.
- ❖ Follow the County/Town Disaster and Emergency Mitigation Plan (CDEMP) which addresses response to a growing Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) in order to prepare the County for wildfires or other natural disaster related emergencies. Review the WUI and CDEMP on a regular basis and update as needed.
- ❖ Encourage programs to combat invasive species populations.
- ❖ Work with public agencies to ensure best management practices of public lands to preserve habitat, limit erosion, and provide low impact recreational opportunities.
- ❖ Work with FWP to control wildlife populations as regulated by existing law.
- ❖ Collaborate with state and federal agencies when planning for wildfire suppression activities.



GOAL

Control weed populations.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Improve range productivity.
- ❖ Preserve native vegetation.
- ❖ Reduce risk of wildfire and potential for erosion.

GOAL

Collaborate with state and federal agencies to explore opportunities to utilize natural resources to the benefit of the County, local taxpayers, and public land users.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Engage in regular communication with CMRWR, USFWS, FWP, DNRC, and BLM
- ❖ Advocate for local presence of federal agencies to foster collaborative relationships.



Petroleum County consists of diverse landscapes that are managed privately and also in coordination with state and federal agencies.



10. Recreational Access

10.1 Access Sites

Surrounding Fort Peck Reservoir in the Northern part of the County is the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge Complex. This area provides hunting and fishing opportunities. The War Horse National Wildlife Refuge comprises 1,152 acres and was established in 1958. It is open to hunting of migratory game birds, upland game birds, and big game. It is also an attraction for hiking, fishing and wildlife observation.



Other privately owned campgrounds include Crooked Creek Recreation Area and Campground, which is located on the southeast portion of the Missouri River just west of Fort Peck Lake. This campground, open year-round, offers a boat ramp with dock and 20 campsites. Dovetail Campground, another privately owned campground, is North of Winnett, MT at the junction of 79 Trail and Crooked Creek Road. Campgrounds located in Winnett are the Hilltop Campground on the north edge of Winnett and the Northern Hotel Campground. All campgrounds are heavily used by hunters and fisherman throughout the year.

10.2 Local Recreational Facilities

The Town operates the George D. Ore Memorial Park and Winnett Swimming Pool, with financial support from The Town of Winnett and Petroleum County as well as private donors. This is the only public swimming pool in the county and well beyond. Besides extensive local use, neighboring communities bring their children for swimming lessons and recreation, joined by their parents and grandparents participating in exercise programs and fun. The land for this pool was donated by the Phillips family in 1962 with the original pool being built by community volunteers. The last major upgrade, which was funded by grant funding, took place in 1981. Funds are presently being raised for much needed repairs and improvements

10.3 Issues Identified

The primary issue with recreation in Petroleum County is the amount of traffic using County infrastructure such as roads and bridges, decreasing the expected lifespan of these critical County-maintained facilities. As more recreationalists travel both to and through the County, the County will need to identify facilities used and create a maintenance plan to address concerns, involving State and Federal agencies as needed.

10.4 Projections for Future Access

Petroleum County recognizes the rights of the general public and government agencies to access public lands. The County will continue to provide the access currently available through the



network of county roads and highways. This will be done while protecting the rights of our landowners to control the use of their private lands and private roads.

10.5 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Collaborate on recreational opportunities issues.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Improve relations between landowners and recreationalists while maintaining the private property rights of the landowners.
- ❖ Maintain communication with State and Federal agencies.
- ❖ Work with public agencies to procure grant funding to help offset the cost of recreationalists.
- ❖ Honor the rights of the general public and government agencies to access public lands recognizing the great access provided in this county by our existing network of county roads and highways while protecting the rights of our landowners to control the use of their private lands and private roads.

GOAL

Encourage change at the legislative level to benefit Counties with high recreational traffic

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Work with officials from state and federal agencies to encourage legislation to provide increased law enforcement during peak recreational seasons such as hunting, fishing and camping.
- ❖ Encourage the legislature to evaluate public agencies ability to provide support to local governments in high traffic recreational areas.



11. Coordination with Local Jurisdictions and Agencies

11.1 County/Town Coordination

Section 76-1-601(3)(g) MCA requires that a growth policy include a statement concerning how a local government will cooperate with other jurisdictional entities in implementing its growth policy. Since this Policy is a cooperative effort between Petroleum County and the Town of Winnett, the only incorporated town in the County, it will be implemented by both entities.

11.2 State and Federal Agencies

State and Federal agencies have the potential to impact resources and influence the use and development of land in Petroleum County. In addition to a large amount of federally owned land managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, the C.M. Russell Wildlife Management Area and fisheries and wildlife management areas overseen by Fish Wildlife and Parks affect recreational opportunities which influence tourism and quality of life.

During development of this Growth Policy agencies operating within the County were invited to a public meeting (agenda in Appendix B). Those agencies represented included:

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
- C.M. Russell Wildlife Management Area (CMRWM)
- Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
- Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
- Petroleum County Conservation District

Each agency was asked to respond to five areas of concern with regard to the Growth Policy:

1. Information and facts about each agency's presence and role in the County including statistics regarding land managed by each agency and how that land use may affect other agency land or private landowners. What personnel live or perform their job as members of the community.
2. Discuss any projected change in agency organization or land use in the next five to ten years.
3. Address any policy decisions that may affect residents, businesses, or governments within Petroleum County in the next five to ten years.
4. Discuss the possibility of cooperative funding or projects that the County might work with them on to improve landowner relations or services to county residents or tourists (economic development, roads and bridges, law enforcement, trails, access, etc.).
5. Identify ways to improve communication and cooperation between County/Town government and state and federal agencies doing business in the County.

Agency personnel appreciated the opportunity to provide input and encouraged the Planning Board and local government leaders to continue to invite them to similar "soundings" to improve communication between County/Town government and state and federal agencies doing business in the County..



12. Implementation Plan

Implementing a strategy for reaching the goals and objectives stated in the Growth Policy is critical to making the document a useful tool for planning the future of Petroleum County. There are a variety of tools that can be used for implementation. These include regulatory and policy tools, available funding or fiscal tools, and training or educational tools that the County government can use. This section lists implementation tools including a mandatory statement by State Law describing how the governing body will review subdivisions within the County. All other tools are contained herein for informational purposes only.

In this section a plan for future review and update of this Growth Policy is also stated.

Finally, an action plan is outlined based on the goals and objectives set for each of the required elements of 76-1-601 through 76-1-606, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) contained in this Growth Policy. The action plan assigns a timeframe to follow through on implementation.

12.1 Implementation Tools

Regulatory Tools

LOCAL REVIEW OF SUBDIVISIONS

Subdivision regulations control the creation of new lots by imposing design and infrastructure standards and by establishing procedures for local government and public review. Regulating the division of land ensures that the development has appropriate services and does not adversely affect resources. Because of the possibility for adverse effects on resources, subdivisions will be reviewed for compliance to the Petroleum County Growth Policy as well as compliance with subdivision regulations recently adopted by the County. As with all regulatory tools, subdivision regulations are most effective with consistent use.

As per §76-3-501 et. Seq. MCA, which requires local government to establish subdivision regulations and outlines the minimum requirements for those regulations, the County completed the process of updating new regulations which are compliant through the 2015 legislative session changes.

As per §76-3-608(3)(a), MCA, the governing body must review proposed subdivisions considering the effect on the following review criteria:

- Agriculture;
- Agricultural water user facilities;
- The natural environment;
- Wildlife;
- Wildlife habitat;
- Local Services; and
- Public health and safety

Petroleum County Subdivision Regulations that describe each of these criteria as well as the subdivision evaluation process and requirements for public review are available in their entirety at the Petroleum County courthouse.



ZONING

Zoning is a commonly used tool for implementing land use policy. Zoning describes the control by authority of the use of land and the buildings that may be placed there. Areas of land are divided by appropriate authorities into zones within which various uses are permitted.

In addition to the more traditional form of zoning, jurisdictions have explored other zoning approaches that can be used to regulate development of property. Some of these alternatives are described below.

Development Design Standards

Development design standards include site and building design standards adopted in zoning regulations. These standards are generally adopted with the intent of preserving and enhancing community character. State law supports the use of design standards if they are objective, reasonable, and applied uniformly throughout a community. Considerations for implementing design standards should include the level of administrative review required and the potential for increased development costs.

Agricultural Zoning

Agricultural zoning is commonly used to restrict land uses to resource extraction and production activities. Other agricultural protection zoning mechanisms include voluntary agricultural districts, agricultural area buffers, area-based zoning or density zoning, fixed area-based allowance zoning and sliding scale area-based allowance zoning.

Interim/Emergency Zoning

Interim zoning is specifically authorized in State law. It is a temporary land use control that expires unless replaced with permanent regulations. Interim zoning means a temporary emergency zoning that is conducted while the local government makes revisions to existing zoning ordinances, or creates and adopts a final zoning plan or zoning ordinance, or addresses some other local policy issue in the state. It helps to preserve the status quo or at least to limit the extent of change that can occur from the zoning activities. It is also termed as stopgap zoning. Emergency zoning may be put in place by the County Commissioners.

DECAY ORDINANCE

Decay ordinances are enacted to protect the general public from decaying structures that are deemed unsafe and inhabitable by a building official.

FLOODPLAIN REGULATIONS

Floodplain regulations restrict development in areas within the 100-year floodplain of a watercourse in order to protect the watercourses and their flood storage areas, as well as the public health, safety, and welfare.

Considerations for Regulatory Enforcement

Regulatory or code enforcement programs ensure that property owners comply with a jurisdiction's land use regulations. The County Planner will receive complaints and forward them to the planning board for consideration. The Planning Board will make recommendations to the County Commissioners.



Fiscal Tools

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

A Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) is used as a budgeting and financial tool by the County to establish long term goals for maintaining, improving, or building new public facilities. The document identifies specific projects, costs, priorities, timetables, and funding sources, and includes all public facilities owned or maintained by the local government. The importance of a CIP for land use planning is the critical connection between where and when infrastructure is provided and what the desired land use pattern is for a community or neighborhood. It is recommended that a full CCIP be prepared every 10 years at a minimum to include a full study of the capital needs of the county.

IMPACT FEES

Impact fees are charged to a developer by local government at the time of development or building permit review to pay for the impacts of new development on off-site capital facilities such as public sewer, roads, fire, or emergency services. Developing a fair and equitable impact fee program can be complex and often requires local governments to obtain outside assistance. Developers or applicants should expect a comprehensive review of long-term costs to the County.

STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS OR LOANS

Grant programs are a key means of implementing public policy regarding affordable and accessible housing, infrastructure extension, economic development, historic preservation, health and human services, crime victim assistance, environmental remediation, and provision of support to low- and moderate-income households and special needs populations. Acquisition and administration of grants for use by the County includes applying for and complying with the requirements of grant contracts; conducting needs assessments and program evaluations; coordinating community responses to identified needs; and seeking resources for the purpose of addressing a variety of community development issues.

Funding Agency Alphabet Soup: □

- TSEP=Treasure State Endowment Program
- CDBG=Community Development Block Grants
- RRGL=Renewable Resource Grant and Loan
- RD=USDA Rural Development
- INTERCAP= Intermediate Term Capital Program
- SRF=State Revolving Fund
- BSTF=Big Sky Trust Fund
- TA=Montana Transportation Alternatives
- WRDA=Water Resources Development Act

The County may also play a role in the acquisition of state and federal grants for local non-profit organizations. This may include sponsorship and/or assistance with grant writing and administration, and providing technical assistance and direct service program administration. Involving local non-profit organizations in needs assessment and other county planning activities may provide a valuable partnership for addressing community development issues.



Grant and loan opportunities commonly used by local governments include:

- Montana Coal Endowment Program (MCEP): planning and construction grants for infrastructure including bridges, water systems, and wastewater systems, solid waste management, and stormwater management.
- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program: planning and construction grants for infrastructure, public facilities, housing, and economic development. CDBG eligibility for construction grants is tied to the benefit the projects will provide for low to moderate income individuals.
- Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Renewable Resource Grant and Loan (RRGL) Program: planning and construction grants for public facility projects including drinking water, wastewater and solid waste development and improvement projects. Other renewable resource projects that have been funded include irrigation rehabilitation, dam repair, soil and water conservation and forest enhancement.
- MDT Transportation Alternatives (TA): grants to improve access to alternative transportation routes along Montana's highways. This can include sidewalks, trails, community gateway features, lighting, and historic rehabilitation.
- USDA Rural Development (RD): planning and construction loans and grants for communities with fewer than 10,000 people. Grant amounts are dependent on Median Household Income.
- State Revolving Fund (SRF): low interest loans used to maintain and improve drinking water systems and water pollution control projects.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING AND TARGETED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

Tax increment financing (TIF) is an important fiscal tool that allows jurisdictions to finance certain kinds of development costs within a Targeted Economic Development (TED) District.

12.2 Growth Policy Timeframe

Annual Review

The Petroleum County Planning Board will review the Growth Policy on an annual basis and provide a Status Report to the County Commissioners. The Status Report will include:

1. Status of goals, objectives and actions suggested in the Growth Policy.
2. Recommendation/assessment of goals to be addressed in the following year.
3. Evaluation of need to revise the Growth Policy.

Condition for Revising the Growth Policy

This Growth Policy is based on existing conditions and anticipated future conditions. It is impossible to project every potential scenario and, therefore, the policy needs to be flexible to accommodate future issues. The Planning Board will review the Growth Policy and determine if changes are needed under the following conditions:

- Major proposed actions made outside of County authority with potential to significantly affect implementation of the stated goals, policies, and strategies in this growth policy.



- Any actions that might affect the health, safety, and welfare of citizens that were inadequately addressed in the growth policy.
- New development proposals not provided for in the plan.
- Priorities that need to be reassessed to take advantage of new opportunities such as grants, partnerships, and State and Federal programs.
- Additional public input suggesting the need for changes.
- Changes in state law regarding growth policies.
- Court cases and/or litigation that set legal precedent in Montana for growth policies.
- Individual neighborhood plans developed in accordance with state law (76-1-601) that is mandated as amendments to the current growth policy.
- Planning Board evaluation of implementation measures and progress, and determination that modifications would enhance the effectiveness of the growth policy.

Process for Revising the Growth Policy

County Commissioners will be notified in writing by the Planning Board prior to commencing work on the revision.

The Planning Board will follow the process outlined in State Law (MCA 76-1-602 through 76-1-603) for adopting a Growth Policy to provide revisions. The Board will conduct a public meeting on the revisions prior to making their recommendation to the County Commission for adoption. The County Commission will follow the provisions of State Law (MCA 76-1-604) to adopt, revise, or reject the changes to the Growth Policy.

12.3 Action Plan

The Action Plan is a matrix intended as a snapshot of the Goals and Objectives outlined in the Growth Policy. It defines each goal and objective and sets a timeframe for accomplishment. For future tracking, additional columns are added for regulations used in implementation, funding sources, and date completed.

Timeframe is limited to:

- Ongoing or Ongoing as Opportunities Arise – indicates something the county or other entities are already involved in or are encouraged to become involved in as circumstances, funding, or other opportunities arise
- Near term (1-5 years)
- Mid-term (5-10 years)
- Long term (<10 years)

14. Goals Met Since 2017

Population

- Stabilization of population loss with 2020 census showing 5% growth
- Seeking resources to improve housing quality, condition, and availability
- Supporting efforts to build affordable rentals

Job growth

Telehealth

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