

Chapter 1. Purpose and Scope

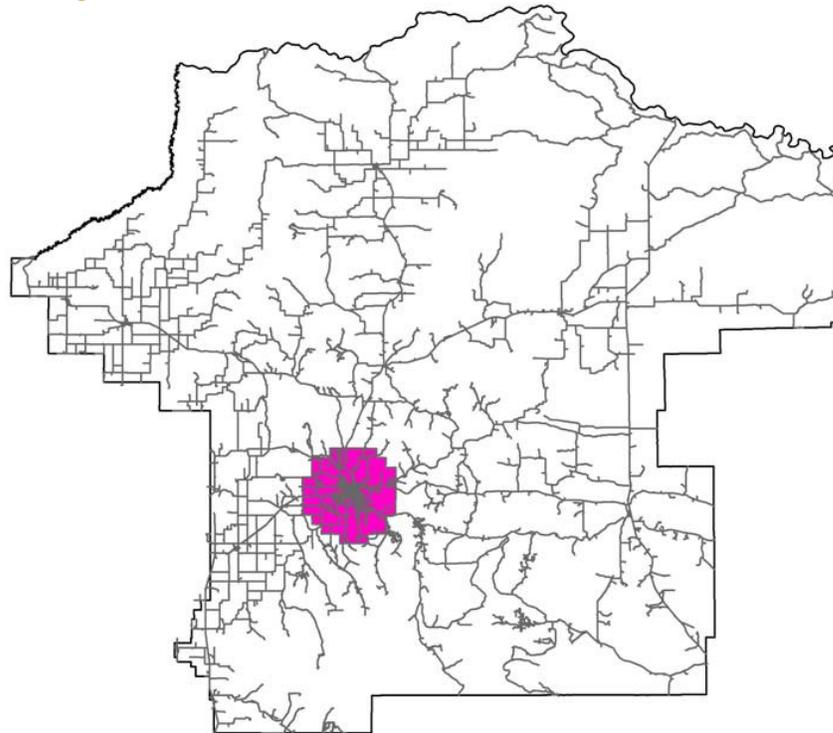
1.1. Purpose

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan that 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

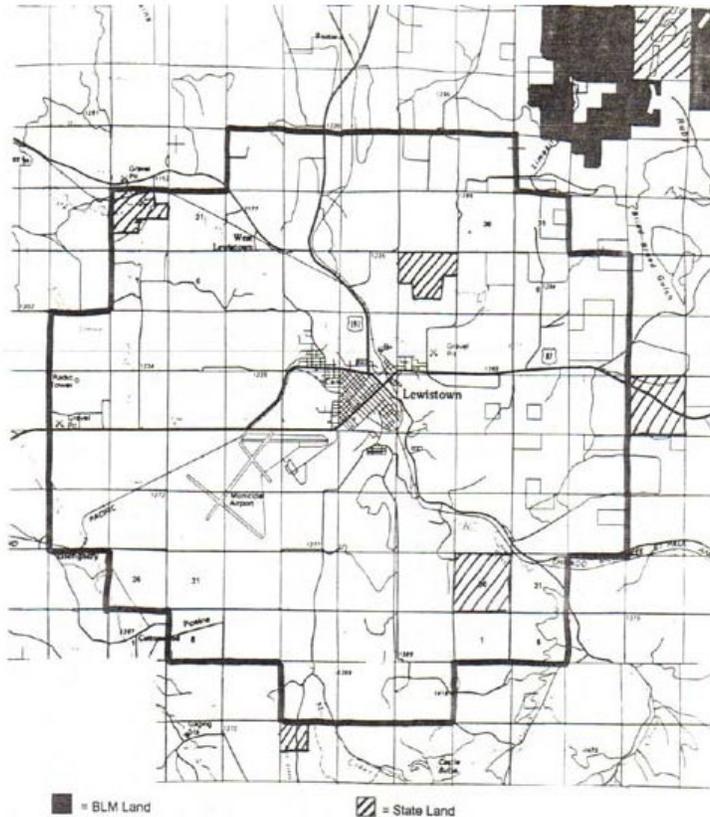
The Fergus County Growth Policy is the responsibility of the Fergus County Planning Board and takes into consideration all areas of the County, excluding the City of Lewistown and the 4 ½ mile jurisdictional area surrounding the City, as defined by interlocal agreement between the City of Lewistown and Fergus County. This includes the incorporated Towns of Moore, Grass Range, Winifred, and Denton.

Figure 1.1 Map of Fergus County indicating the jurisdictional responsibility of the Fergus County Planning Board



The City of Lewistown, under the guidance of the City-County Planning Board, established a Lewistown Growth Policy in 2006 that addresses growth within the City boundaries and a 4 ½ mile jurisdiction area surrounding the City (shown in pink above).

Figure 1.2 City of Lewistown Growth Policy Coverage Area as shown in the Lewistown Growth Policy (2006)



Map provided by Applied Communications, 2000 showing a base map from the Bureau of Land Management "Surface Management Status", 1988 and the approximate 4 ½ mile boundary based on township lines and current City limits.

1.3. Authority

Fergus County Commissioners, to address the most critical issues facing the County now and in the near future, have authorized the Fergus County Planning Board to develop a County 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 Fergus County and Incorporated Towns

The Fergus County Planning Office is responsible for land use planning in Fergus County with the exception of the incorporated cities and towns other than those that contract with the County for services. The Planning Office works cooperatively with the City of Lewistown Planning Office for planning issues in the non-incorporated 4 ½ mile area beyond the Lewistown City limits.

Fergus County currently has two planning boards. The first being the County Planning Board with five members and the second City-County Planning board, consisting of nine members, who have jurisdiction for the 4 ½ mile area of Fergus County and the City of Lewistown.

Planning activities undertaken by the Planning Department over the last several years involve land use (i.e. subdivision regulations, floodplain regulations and permitting, Airport Affected Area) and general regulatory activities (i.e. COS review, permitting). The Department is also involved with other agencies in creating services and policies. They

worked with Disaster and Emergency Services to create digital maps for the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan and participated in the Joint Land Use Study committee with Counties hosting Malmstrom Defense Installations.

Planning documents developed and/or utilized and enforced by Fergus County include:

- Fergus County Subdivision Regulations
- Fergus County Floodplain Regulations
- Lewistown Municipal Airport Affected Area Regulations

Fergus County has also adopted road and bridge standards and regularly updates their Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP), with the most recent plan prepared in 2016. Fergus County, in conjunction with Choteau County, prepared a corridor study in 2011 for the road system from Winifred to Big Sandy. The document outlines improvement options and funding strategies for the Counties to plan for improvements to this transportation corridor.

The County established a Land Use Policy (LUP) in 1992 and restated it in October of 2011. A draft update of the LUP is currently being considered by the County and will be incorporated into the Land Use section of this document. This policy helps guide the use of the lands and resources in the county without eliminating the rights of private property owners. The LUP addresses areas of concern from business, industry, schools, education, forestry, wildlife, endangered species, tourism, recreation, mining, agriculture and water resources.

Fergus County is an active member of the Snowy Mountain Development Corporation (SMDC). Their association with that organization provides planning benefits for the County that are otherwise difficult for smaller communities to develop on their own with limited budgets and staff. Participating in developing the Community Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region provides opportunity for Fergus County residents to provide input on monitoring and evaluating long term economic goals and strategies for the region. This type of region-wide planning highlights capital improvements necessary for the area to provide opportunity for the economic well-being of the communities within the planning area.

Planning documents currently being utilized by the County's incorporated towns include:

- Town of Denton Floodplain Hazard Management Regulations
- Town of Moore Floodplain Hazard Management Regulations

1.5. Public Involvement

The County Planning Board established a public involvement plan for development of the Growth Policy that included a variety of means for public education and input. The plan incorporated the use of a Growth Policy Advisory Committee to assist the County Planning Board as liaisons from the incorporated towns that participated in preparation of the document. That Committee attended regular meetings of the Planning Board, sought local comment on issues faced by each community, and assisted with public meetings and open houses.

The full Growth Policy Public Involvement Plan is included in Appendix A along with other outreach documentation utilized to engage the residents of Fergus County.

A survey was prepared and conducted throughout development of the Growth Policy to solicit public information on the growth (or lack thereof) issues and ideas to assist in establishing the goals and objectives of the Policy. The survey was made available online through the projects' web site and linked via the County's web site and Facebook Page. It was also posted in the Lewistown News Argus and at various public venues throughout the County including the Fergus County courthouse and Town Halls in Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred.

A public meeting was held in October 2021 at the Fergus County Community Center to provide information on development of the Growth Policy and to seek initial public input. A draft document was made available for review via the Planning Office and online and the Planning Board and Advisory Committee hosted individual tables for comment on the draft based on the areas addressed in the Growth Policy.

Fergus County is a Charter form of government (one of six counties in Montana) and, as such, maintains a Community Council. The Council is elected for a two-year term from each commissioner district to advise the Commissioners. Input on the Growth Policy was sought from the Council during development and prior to adoption by the Commission in a noticed public meeting.

In addition to the Community Council and the Advisory Committee, thank you to the following groups and organizations for participating in outreach regarding the content of the Growth Policy:

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1.6. Document Organization

The Fergus County 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 Fergus County and the individual incorporated Towns of Moore, Grass Range, Winifred, and Denton, followed by projections that may affect the future of the County and associated communities. 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.

Chapter 2. County Background

Fergus County was created by act of the Fourteenth Legislative Assembly, Montana Territory, in the Spring of 1885 and named for James Fergus, a Montana politician who was instrumental in creating the County. It covers 4,253 square miles and 2,765,685 acres. It is 70 miles north to south at the longest distance and 90 miles across the longest distance east to west. The original Fergus County was subsequently divided into what are now entirely or partly the counties of Musselshell, Petroleum, Judith Basin, Wheatland, Golden Valley and the present Fergus County. The size of Fergus County at its inception was greater than many of the New England States.

Homesteaders, trappers, miners, and merchants were some of the first settlers in the County. Farming and ranching later became the economic driver of the County as it remains today.

Lewistown was the first established City in the County and serves as the County seat. Other incorporated Towns in the County are Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred. Other small communities in the County include Hilger, Roy, Danvers, and Coffee Creek.

Add more here as available – Pam sending to Shirley Barrick.

Denton

The Town of Denton was established as the railroad was extended to that point in the state. The post office has been in operation since 1888 and the postmaster named the Town after the Missouri county where he was from.

Grass Range

Grass Range, likely named to exemplify the cattle grazing that occurs near the Town, established a post office in 1883.

Moore

The Town of Moore began in 1903 with the construction of the Montana Central Railway's line west of Lewistown. It was named after Henry D. Moore, who had helped finance the railroad.

Winifred

Winifred was founded in 1913 as the terminus of a newly built branch line of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad ("the Milwaukee Road"). It is believed to have been named after one of the railroad owner's two daughters (the other being Christina, another small town about 15 miles away).

Chapter 3. Population

3.1. Demographics

Fergus County's total population, according to the Montana Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC), was estimated at 11,050 in 2019, a decrease of 67 over 2018 and a decrease of 414 since a high of 11,464 people in 2013. This gradual decline since 2013 is related to a general decline in the birth rate as families are choosing to have smaller families and farms and ranches are getting bigger and turning to automation to reduce the cost or need for laborers. In addition, many productive farm and ranch operations or other local property is being purchased for recreational purposes by out of county residents.

Table 3.1 Fergus County Population (Montana CEIC)

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
11,391	11,464	11,329	11,307	11,349	11,281	11,117	11,050

Population totals for the Towns of Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred are shown below.

Table 3.2 Fergus County Consolidated Towns Population¹

Community	2019 estimated population	2010 population	% change
Denton	296	377	21.5%
Grass Range	120	149	19.5%
Moore	181	219	17.4%
Winifred	111	111	0%

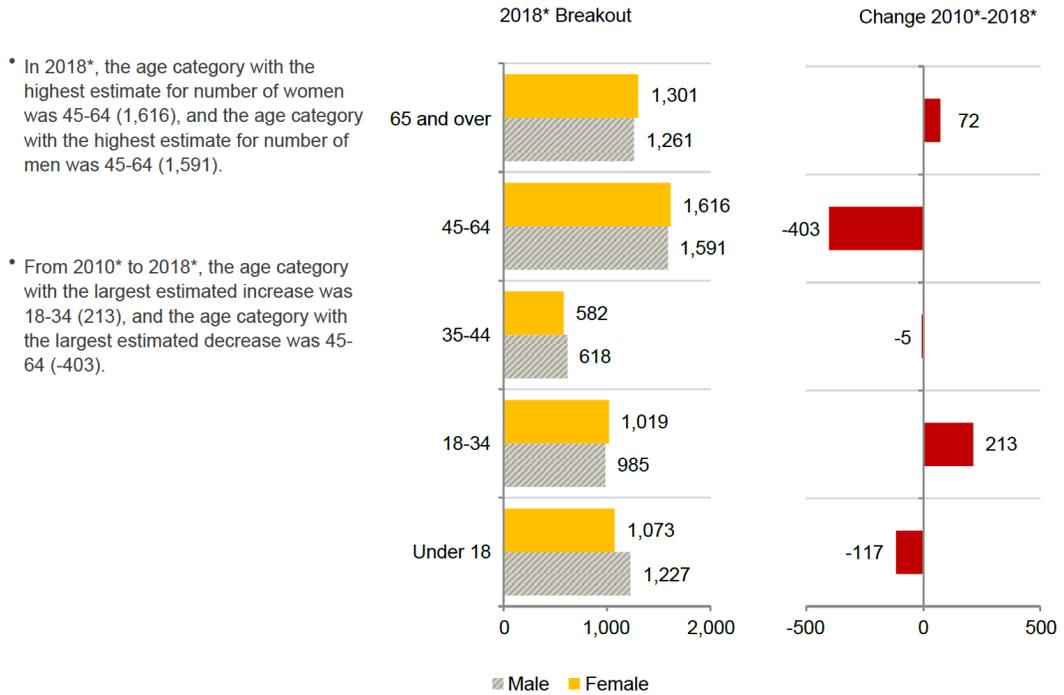
Fergus County and the incorporated Towns, with the exception of Winifred, have experienced decline in population over the last six to ten years. The Headwaters Economic Demographic Profile of the County² indicates a median age in Fergus County in 2018 of 46. Nearly 23% of the population is over the age of 65 as compared to 22% in 2010. 28% is between 45 and 64 and 20% is under the age of 18.

A lack of growth in the population is typical of rural Montana communities where agriculture is the primary source of economic activity. Individuals living in Fergus County tend to seek employment and economic opportunities in other areas of the state or country. Modernization of agricultural practices requires fewer people and fewer opportunities for employment are available. Ranches in the County, though still primarily family run operations, have consolidated and require fewer employees. The aging of agricultural leaders also carries the possibility that farms and ranches will be sold and those individuals will move out of the County.

¹ Headwaters Economics, Economic Profile System, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/eps>, March 2021 – A Demographic Profile

² Headwaters Economics, Economic Profile System, <https://headwaterseconomics.org/eps>, March 2021 – A Demographic Profile

Figure 3.1 Headwaters Economics Profile of Median Age by Gender in Fergus County



Similar median age range and an increase in that age is evident throughout most of the consolidated towns:

Figure 3.2 Headwaters Economics Profile of Median Age by Town

Community	Median Age 2019/2010	Under 18	18-34	35-44	45-64	65+
Denton	48.2/35.6	23%	12.8%	9.8%	37.2%	17.2%
Grass Range	59.6/43.9	12.5%	6.7%	8.3%	35%	37.5%
Moore	55.1/44.2	21%	9.9%	9.4%	28.2%	31.5%
Winifred	39.9/39.7	4.5%	31.5%	5.4%	24.3%	34.2%

The Snowy Mountain Development Corporation’s (SMDC) Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) indicates that the two smallest age groups, 18-34 year olds (17.8%) and 35-44 year olds (10.6%), are the prime age for workforce, which contributes to a lack of labor force in the County.

3.2. Projections

CEIC obtained data from a Regional Economic Models, Inc. (REMI) release dated July 2019 that projects population estimates by county to 2060. Projections for Fergus County every 10 years are shown in the table below. REMI is a forecasting and policy analysis tool utilized to inform and improve public policy decisions.³

³ Regional Economic Models, Inc., [REMI-2020-Brochure.pdf](#)

Table 3.2 Fergus County Population Projections

2030	2040	2050	2060
11,866	12,017	11,949	12,001

These projections show a slight increase in the population indicating the potential for growth despite the aging population and apparent lack of current economic opportunities for residents of the County. Contributors to the content of this Growth Policy identified several factors that may lead to growth in population in the future. These include:

- The effect of the COVID pandemic that had provided the opportunity for remote work that allows residents who might otherwise need to move away for employment to stay local.
- Providence University’s nursing program in Lewistown that is providing opportunity for nursing education in the County.
- The Come Home to Montana campaign being initiated by the current administration that seeks to encourage Montanans who have relocated to other states to return to Montana to work remotely, start a business here, or take advantage of job opportunities across the state’s industries.

One caveat to the optimism about the ability for Fergus County to maintain or grow its population is that there is a lack of high speed internet in parts of the County which may continue to stall economic development.

3.3. Goals and Objectives

Need to discuss whether or not these need to be separated by entity – if communities have their own, we’ll separate out.

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) seek to maintain the county’s rural lifestyle with limited growth that produces a stable, vital community.

OBJECTIVES

- Utilize Snowy Mountain Development Corporation to develop means of recruiting businesses to the County. Work with SMDC to identify the benefits of locating businesses in Fergus County based on something the planning board will discuss. What attracts business to the County?
- Support activities that would expand opportunities that take advantage of existing economic drivers in the County (i.e. meat processing, others?).

Chapter 4. Land Use

4.1. Land Description

Fergus County contains a total of 2,783,891.93 acres or approximately 4350 square miles situated in the central region of Montana. The Missouri River acts as the northern boundary for the county with the Snowy Mountains near the southern boundary. The County contains island mountain ranges such as the Moccasins and Judith’s, all surrounded by the central plains and coulees. Arrow Creek

and Judith River Basin flow north to the Missouri River whereas McDonald and Flatwillow flow easterly, providing importance to the agricultural industry and wildlife habitat in the area.

Nearly a quarter of land ownership in Fergus County is maintained by Federal and State agencies, with the rest of the land being privately owned. The Bureau of Land Management is the largest public land institution in the County, managing the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

Lewiston is the only incorporated city, the County Seat, in Fergus County along with four incorporated towns including Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred.

4.2. Existing Land Use

Land Ownership

Land Ownership in Fergus County is 76.27% privately owned while 23.65% of land is publicly owned, as seen in *Table 4.1* below. Montana’s Department of Revenue property type classification was used to determine the most prevalent property type in the County. Nearly 75% of land is either Vacant Land-Rural or Farmstead-Rural. Exempt Property type is the second most prevalent but is more difficult to represent what the property type may be used for. Exempt Property are parcels which have been granted exemptions through an application process for any land owner. Ownership of Exempt Property more commonly includes Local, State and Federal entities, but not limited to religious, charitable or education groups.

Table 4.1 Land Ownership in Fergus County

Ownership	Total Acres	Percentage of Acreage
Publicly Owned Land	658,508.60	23.65%
Privately Owned Land	2,123,338.01	76.27%
Total Land in County	2,783,891.93	

Table 4.2 below represents all other property types within Fergus County. Comparing the total acres of publicly owned land to total acres of Exempt Property type, knowing majority of ownership of Exempt Property are City, State, or Federal entities, it is presumed that nearly most of the Exempt Property is public land. Calculating all Rural property types (including Exempt Property) 99.37% of property in Fergus County is consider Rural, with 0.07% property consider Urban. Residential property type including Apartment, Improved Property, and Manufactured Home for Rural and Urban environments make up a total of 0.85% of total land use in Fergus County. The most predominant property type found within incorporated limits of Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred (*Figure 4.3*) are shown to be Improved Property-Urban and Vacant Land-Urban, with Vacant Land-Rural and Farmstead-Rural property types surround town limits.

Table 4.2 Land Ownership in Fergus County

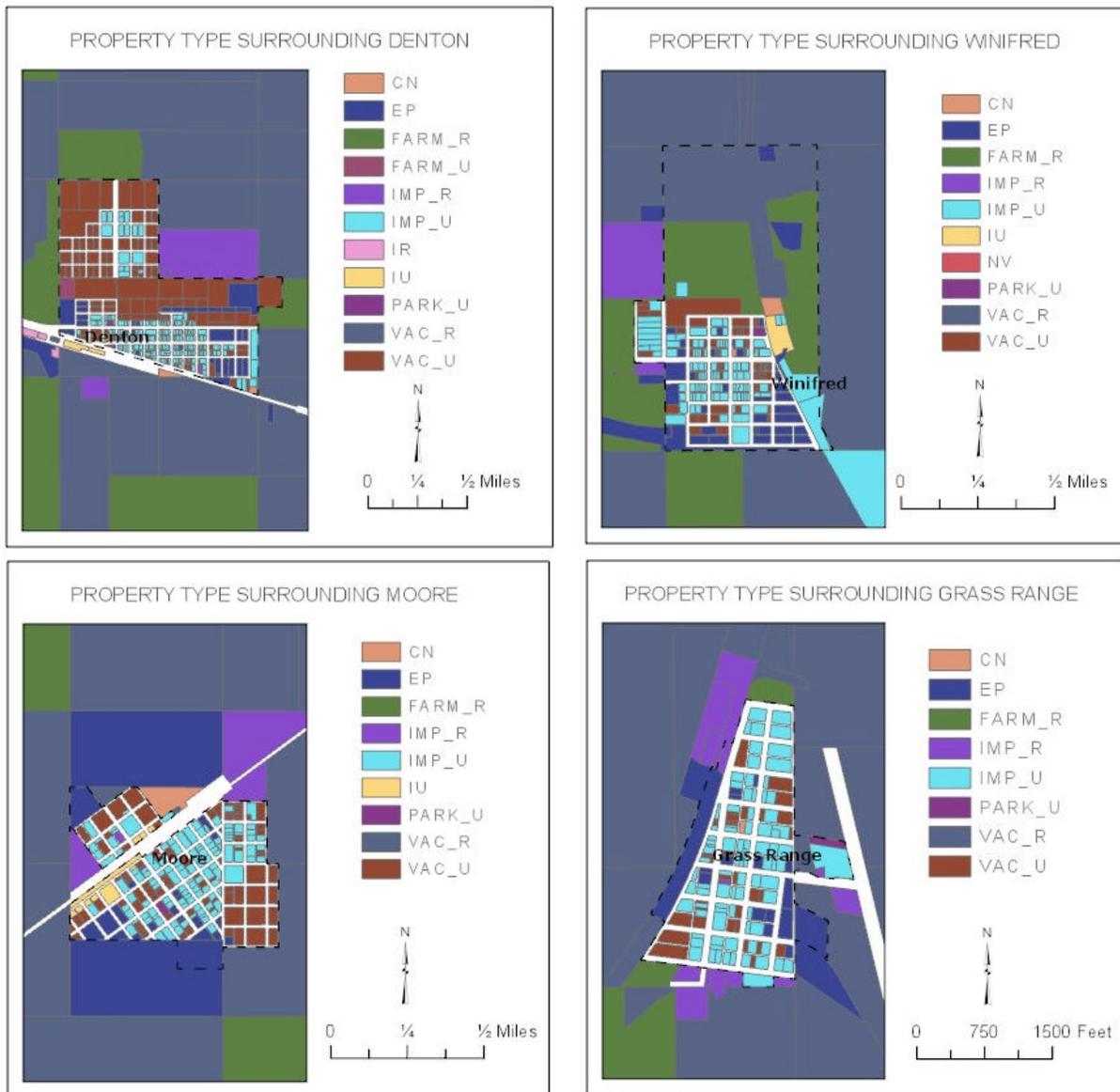
Property Type	Parcels	Total Acres	Percent of Acreage in County
APT_R - Apartment Rural	1	0.72	<0.001%
APT_U - Apartment Urban	23	7.55	<0.001%
CN - Centrally Assessed Non-Valued Property	41	180.44	0.01%

EP - Exempt Property*	2,840	658,076.52	23.64%
EP_PART - Partial Exempt Property	2	1.61	<0.001%
FARM_R - Farmstead - Rural	1,577	393,913.01	14.15%
FARM_U - Farmstead - Urban	1	5.12	<0.001%
GOLF - Golf Course	4	255.14	0.01%
GRAVEL - Gravel Pit	2	21.53	<0.001%
IMP_R - Improved Property - Rural	1,707	22,686.16	0.81%
IMP_U - Improved Property - Urban	3,156	928.12	0.03%
IR - Industrial Rural	7	73.30	<0.001%
IU - Industrial Urban	13	14.69	<0.001%
MINE - Mining Claim	183	3,770.58	0.14%
NV - Non-Valued Property	3	2.17	<0.001%
NVS - Non-Valued with Specials	3	2.94	<0.001%
PARK_R - Manufactured Home Park - Rural	3	19.11	<0.001%
PARK_U - Manufactured Home Park - Urban	14	47.68	<0.001%
VAC_R - Vacant Land - Rural	10,663	1,691,588.52	60.76%
VAC_U - Vacant Land - Urban	600	833.61	0.03%
Unclassified**	194	11,463.40	0.41%
Fergus County Total	21,037	2,783,891.93	

*Exempt Property includes land owned by religious, charitable, educational groups, as well as City, State and Federal entities.

**Unclassified includes roadways and waterways.

Figure 4.3 Property types surrounding Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred.



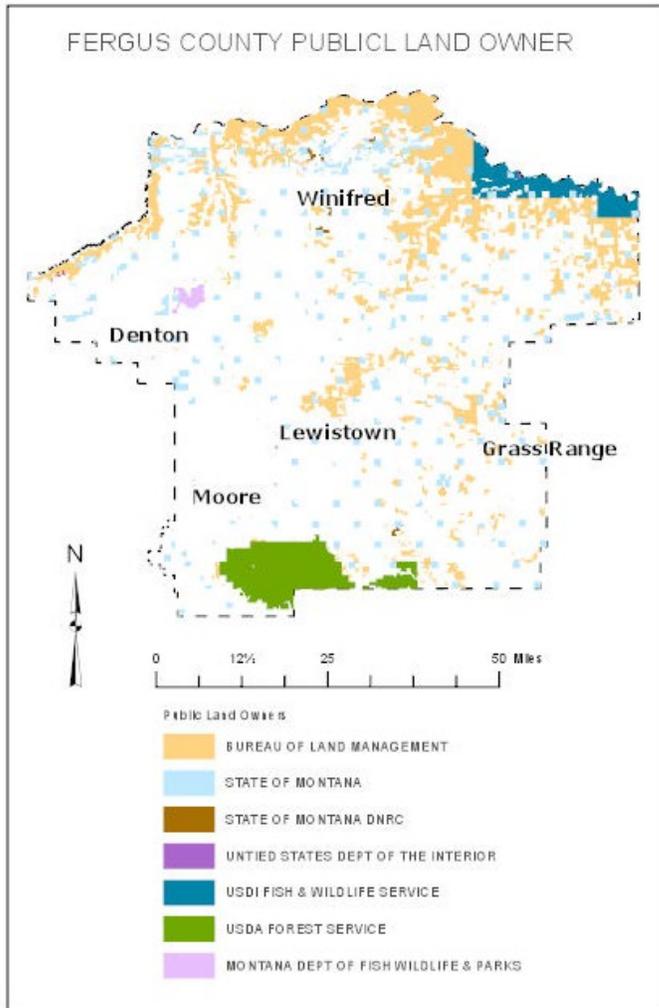
Public Land Ownership

As seen in *Table 4.3* below, 23.65% of land in Fergus County is public land owned by State or Federal entities. The Bureau of Land Management is the predominant public landowner encompassing nearly 12.44% in Fergus County. Geographically, the majority of public land is in the north half of the county along Arrow Creek and Missouri River corridors with USDA Forest Service managing areas of the Big Snowy and Little Snowy Mountains south in the County, as seen in *Figure 4.4* below. State entities and the Bureau of Land Management is scattered throughout the county providing closer access to public land for County residents and visitors. Communities including Denton and Moore have fewer quantity of public land in proximity compared to other communities such as Winifred, Grass Range and Lewistown.

Table 4.3 Publicly owned land in Fergus County

Ownership	Total Acres	Percentage of Acreage
Bureau of Land Management	346,401.66	12.44%
State of Montana	157,905.46	5.67%
USFS	94,226.39	3.38%
USDI Fish and Wildlife Service	49,640.32	1.78%
Montana Dept of Fish Wildlife & Parks	6,878.61	0.25%
State of Montana DNRC	2,872.92	0.10%
United States Dept of the Interior	583.24	0.02%
Total Publicly Owned Land	658,508.60	23.65%
Total Land in County	2,783,891.93	

Figure 4.4 Map of public land in Fergus County



4.3 Future Land Use Projections

Future property type in Fergus County is expected to remain Vacant Land and Farmstead for much of the rural area **for agricultural purposes (refer to Economic Development Chapter 6)** while towns, both incorporated and unincorporated, may continue to maintain or lose population depending on factors described in Chapter 3, Population. Families in Fergus County are aging and facing difficulties of passing their operations to younger generations, causing opportunities for outside investors to purchase those lands.

Federal agencies must coordinate actions with this Growth Policy, Planning Board, Land Use Plan, and Commission as they make decisions on land use in the county.

Currently, as seen in the *Table 4.5* below, 10.55% parcels in Fergus County are out of state landowners. Absentee owners of purchased operations or for recreational reasons rarely establish roots in the community resulting in a loss sense of community. It is possible investors or developers may increase land purchase which could take land out of agricultural production and increase industrial uses.

Impacts from land use in Lewistown will greatly affect communities within proximity such as Moore, however communities such as Denton, Winifred, and Grass Range may not experience the same outcomes because of the distance. With a majority of property in town being Improved Property with existing residential, Vacant Land does exist to promote residential, commercial or industrial growth.

Table 4.5 Landowner Taxation

Residents From	Parcels Taxed	Percent of Parcels
Montana	18602	89.45%
Out of State	2193	10.55%
Total	20795	

- Consider Subdivision activity in County for projection areas and Subdivision Trends (ie FMT, BLA, AG-Cov, Minor, Major, etc)
- Property Sales for trends
- Population Forecast + Land Vacancy (municipalities) = surplus/deficit housing?
 - Is there a need for future planning?

4.4 Policy, Regulatory and Financial Items

The Fergus County Land Use Policy and Subdivision Regulations are the primary tools employed to guide the use of lands and resources while protecting the rights of private landowners of Fergus County residents. Because nearly a quarter of lands in Fergus County are Federal or State lands, the Land Use Policy is a major instrument for Fergus County. Any land management activity conducted by Federal or State agencies are required to coordinate with local communities and citizens before any action is taken.

The subdivision review process is a policy to promote development and protect public health and safety, it does not regulate the location or type of land use development. There are a variety of additional tools that can be used by the County and Incorporated City/Towns to implement land use

goals and objectives. Not all land use polices and regulatory tools are appropriate for rural Montana communities and, therefore, local governments 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 Districts (TED)
 - 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 regulation
 - Conservations Easements
 - Floodplain regulations
 - Buildings for Leaser 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 Improvement Plans
 - Targeted Economic Development Districts (TED)
 - Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts
 - Education towards and development of more valuable commodities that thereby make ranches / farms more profitable

4.5 Goals and Objectives

GOAL

- Preserve existing land uses by encouraging compatible development.

OBJECTIVES

- Maintain subdivision regulations that facilitate new development while protecting public health and safety, taxpayers, lot buyers, and the environment.
- 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 polices that may limit the type of development allowed on property in exchange for some predictability about the types of development that can be undertake.
- Encourage the voluntary preservation of open space, wildlife habitat and livestock habitat in the County by developers of prosed subdivision.
- Coordinate land use polices and infrastructure development to preserve water resources used by agricultural producers.

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 polices that would regulate rural residential developments.
- Identify opportunities for providing education on land use practices.

- Invoke Right to Farm Legislation where appropriate.

Chapter 5. Housing

5.1. Current Characteristics and Conditions

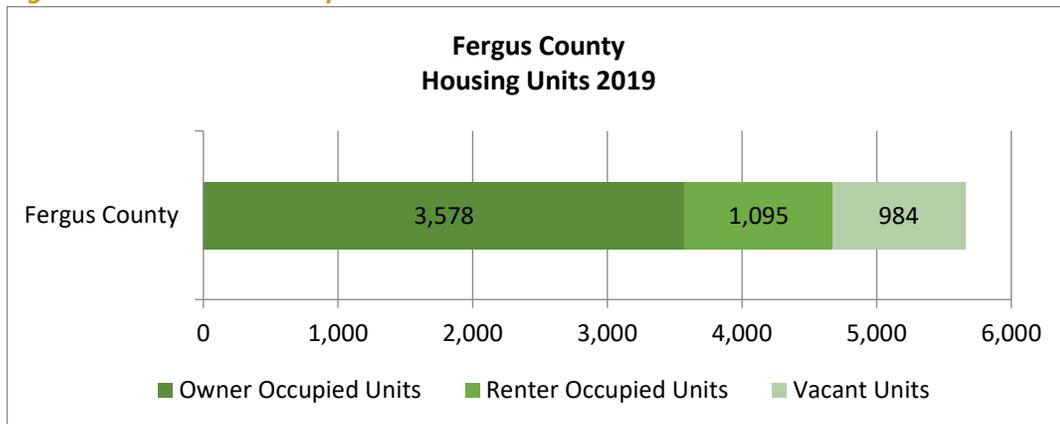
A lack of quality housing is one of the County’s primary concerns as the availability of housing is low and much of the available housing is of poor quality. This issue, coupled with significantly increased prices for quality housing, may be caused by a lack of economic incentive to build or maintain decent housing, difficulty building or maintaining homes due to the high cost of materials and labor, or elderly residents leaving homes unoccupied.

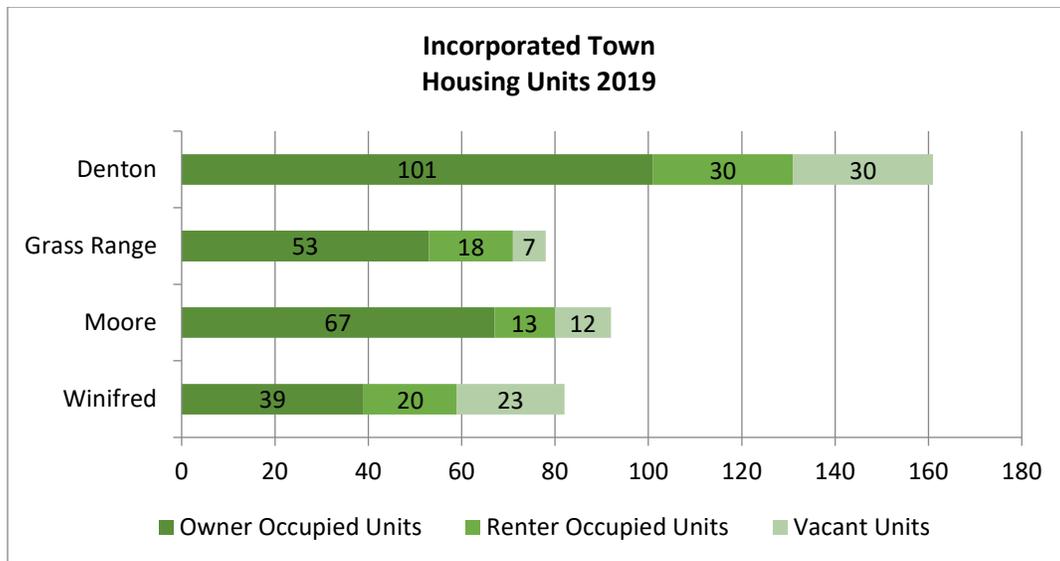
According to the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) published by Snowy Mountain Development in 2017, housing continues to be a concern in most central Montana counties. Housing is one weakness identified in the region, due to poor housing stock, low housing values and increased mortgage payments. To support these findings, more than 30% of the housing stock in Fergus County was built prior to 1939, which directly impacts the average home value in the County.

Based on information provided by the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS), published by the U.S. Census Bureau, Fergus County has a total of 5,896 housing units serving 4,912 households. Of these housing units, 720 have been identified as mobile homes and 433 are identified as multi-unit structures with three or more rental units.

The population of Fergus County has been steadily declining since 2010 and the County is among a number of additional rural Montana counties with a decline in the percentage of home ownership. The number of owner-occupied units decreased in Fergus County between 2010 and 2019, as well as the number of total occupied housing units; however, with an owner-occupied rate of 69%, Fergus County is slightly above the average for Montana, with the average state rate of homeownership at 68%.

Figure 5.1 Home Ownership





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, and Fergus County has approximately 425 properties with three or more units. Based on information provided by Headwaters Economics, 24% of households are paying more than 30% of their total household income on a mortgage, and 26% are paying more than 30% of their total household income on rent.

Figure 5.2 Housing Affordability

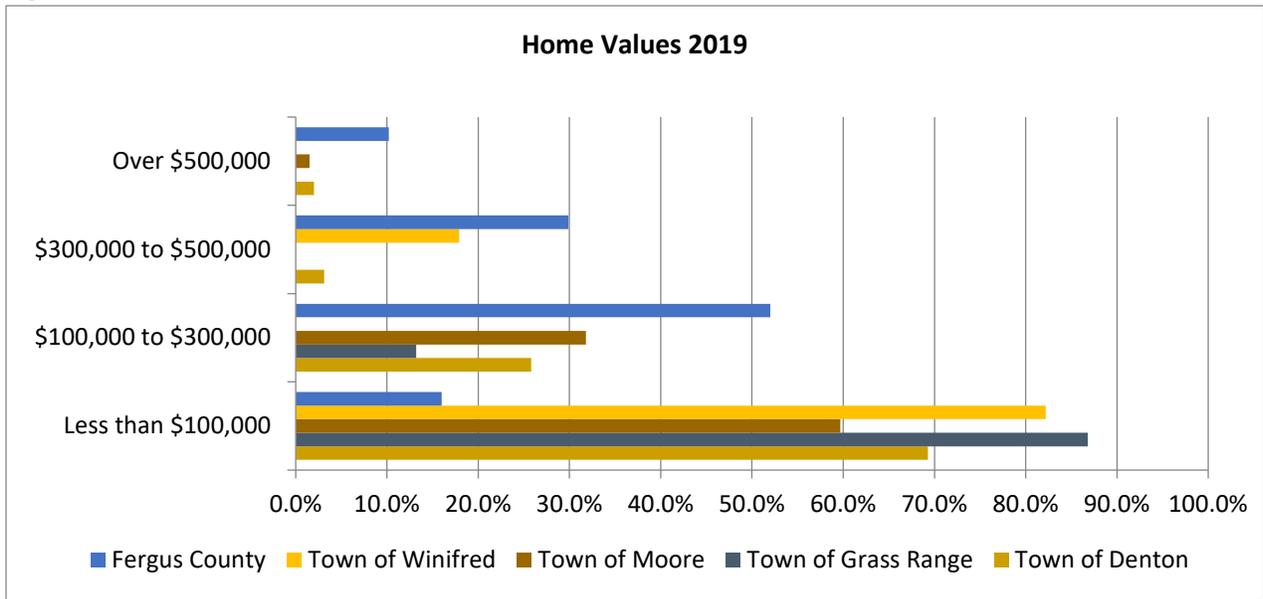
Percent of Households with Home Costs Greater than 30% of Total Household Income		
	Fergus County	United States
Mortgage Costs	24%	28.5%
Rent	26%	46.5%

The percentage of Low to Moderate Income residents in Fergus County and Incorporated Towns ranges from 31% to 60% 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 Fergus County, all located within the city limits of Lewistown.

According to the ACS, the 2019 median value of owner-occupied units in Fergus County was \$143,000, up from 2014, when the median value was \$120,200. The majority of homes in Fergus County, as a whole, are valued at less than \$100,000.⁴ However, given an influx of interest in 2020-2021, realtor.com reports the median listing home price of \$225,000.

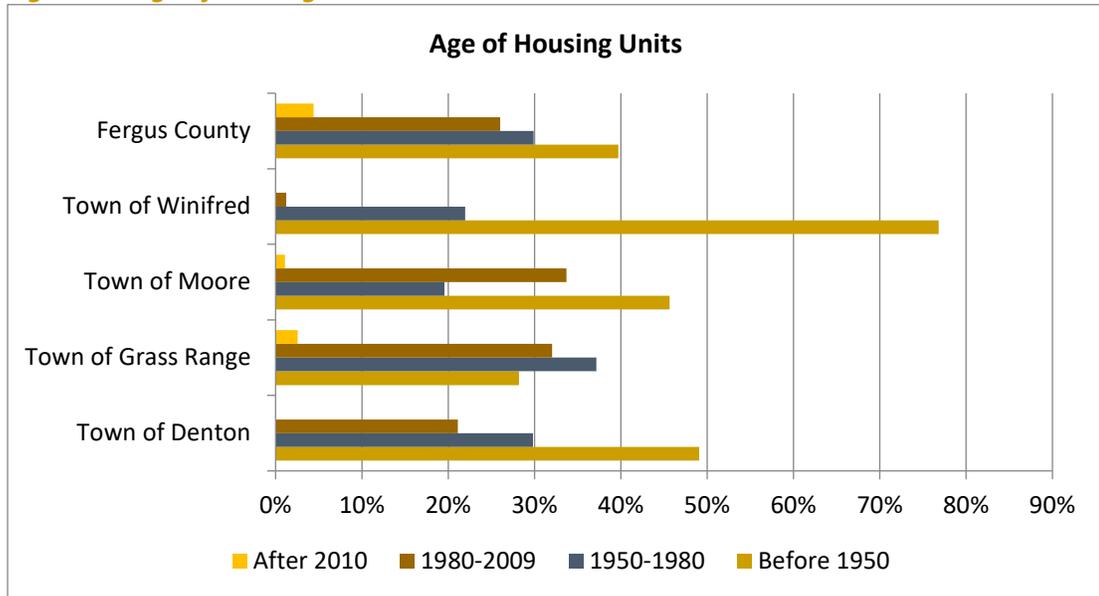
⁴ American Community Survey 5-year Data Profile, U.S. Census Bureau, [Housing - Census and Economic Information Center \(mt.gov\)](https://www.census.gov/hhes/housing/acs/housing.html)

Figure 5.3 Home Values



Most of the County is rural in nature, and in general, is comprised of older housing which does not provide the same investment value as housing in larger cities and towns. According to the CEDS written by Snowy Mountain Development Corporation in 2012, a major challenge in the general region surrounding Fergus 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. Fergus 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 5.4 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 has improved among older residents and rural counties, like Fergus County, have high populations of seniors. Furthermore, interest in living in Fergus County by telecommuters or retired individuals over the last several years may potentially change the population makeup of the County. Housing that supports the needs of seniors will continue to be in demand. Housing prices caused by population influx verses the amount of housing available may make affordability of houses, particularly in the more metropolitan areas, difficult for seniors and young families.

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 shortage of land or affordable lots suitable to support development of new housing where infrastructure is readily available in Fergus County and surrounding incorporated towns. 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 Fergus County include:

- Montana Department of Commerce (MDOC):
 - 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
 - HOME grants – provided by HUD and MDOC
 - Homebuyer Assistance
 - Affordable Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
 - 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.

Chapter 6. Economic Development

The remoteness of Fergus County and the incorporated Towns, limited employment opportunities, and limited goods and services all have an effect on the overall economy of the area.

Of the total County population of 11,273 residents, 8,973 are over the age of 16 and 5,735 are currently working. Service-related workers make up 55.2% of the employed labor force, 28.8% are employed by non-service-related industries, and 16% are employed with the State, County, or Town government.

6.1. Employment

Total average employment in Fergus County has remained relatively stable since 2011. Although there have been a few small fluctuations in the work force, approximately 62% of the population over the age of 16 is currently in the labor force.

As you can see from the data below, Fergus County and the Towns of Denton and Moore report the same primary industry of education, healthcare and social assistance services. The Towns of Grass Range and Winifred report their primary industry as construction. Other industries employing a significant portion of the workforce include the agriculture, retail trade, and accommodation and food service.

Table 6.1 County & Town Industries

	Fergus County	Denton	Grass Range	Moore	Winifred
Number of Civilian Employees	5,735	172	54	84	66
Industry	% of Workforce				
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting and mining	11.5	18.6	5.6	14.3	21.2
Construction	9.2	1.7	51.9	2.4	25.8
Manufacturing	6.1	5.2	1.9	4.8	1.5
Wholesale Trade	2.5	6.4	3.7	11.9	0.0
Retail Trade	12.8	10.5	14.8	20.2	7.6
Transport, warehousing and utilities	3.3	9.3	1.9	3.6	0.0
Information	1.6	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0
Finance, insurance and real estate	4.3	1.7	0.0	1.2	10.6
Professional, management, administration, waste management	5.3	0.0	0.0	6.0	9.1
Education, health care, social assistance	23.7	33.1	7.4	20.2	22.7
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, food	8.0	10.5	0.0	3.6	1.5
Other services, except public administration	7.1	2.3	13.0	8.3	0.0
Public administration	4.7	0.6	0.0	2.4	0.0

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of central Montana, with 78.8% of the land in Fergus County being dedicated to the industry. According to data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, agricultural land in Fergus County is comprised of 845 farms, with 2,188,069 acres in farmland. The market value of agricultural products sold totaled approximately \$133 million, and government subsidies to farm operators funded an additional \$12.3 million. Government appropriations include such items as crop insurance premiums, and disaster, conservation, and commodity subsidies. From 1960-2014, Fergus County saw a 40% decline of employment in agricultural occupations. 93% of the farms in the County are considered family farms, and 29% of the farms hire farm labor.

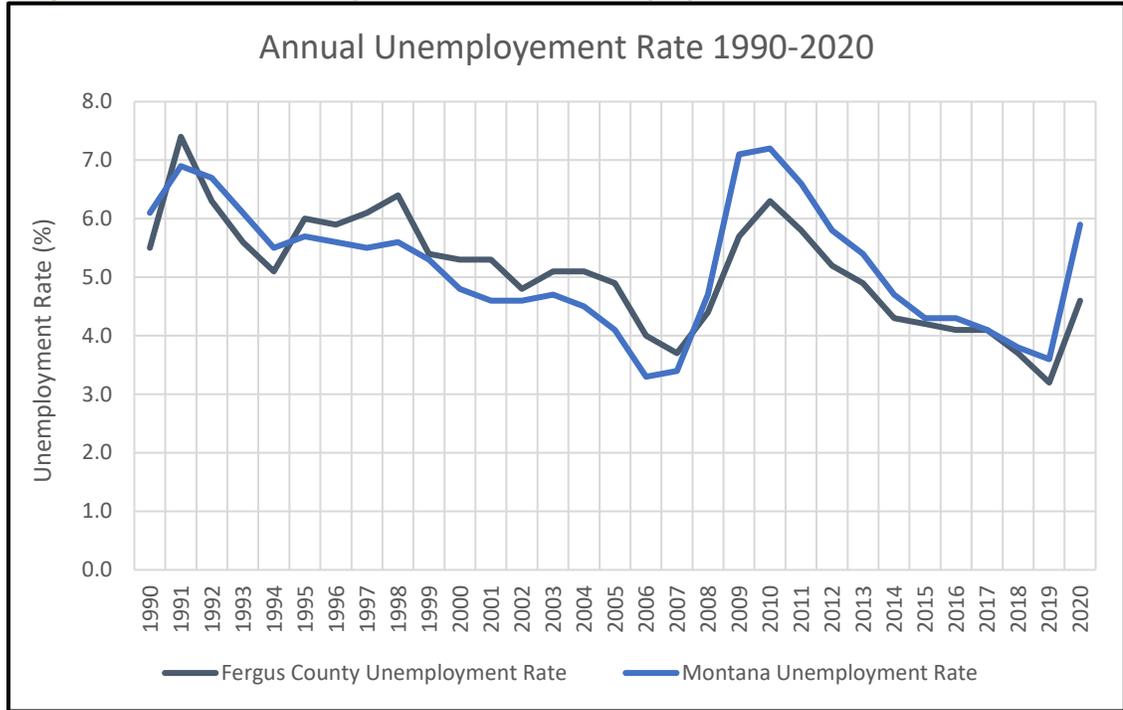
Table 6.2 Agricultural Commodities in Fergus County

Crops	
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	\$35,964,000
Other crops and hay	\$9,498,000
Livestock, Poultry and Products	
Poultry and eggs	\$41,000
Cattle and calves	\$93,478,000
Hogs and pigs	\$18,000
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	\$479,000
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	\$342,000

Fergus County ranks 3rd in the State of Montana for total agricultural product sold, and 1st in the State for livestock, poultry and associated products sold. These numbers provide evidence that the agricultural industry has a large impact on the overall economic health of the County and its residents.

Unemployment in the County is 2.9% as of July 2021, which 1.2% lower than it was in July 2020, and lower than the State unemployment rate of 3.6%.

Figure 6.1. Montana County and Reservation Unemployment Rates



In general, employment in Fergus County has remained relatively stable since 2014, with a few small fluctuations in employment numbers since that time. 2019 had the lowest unemployment rate, with 3.6% unemployment. The highest unemployment rate was recorded in 2020, with 5.9% unemployment. (US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, data.bls.gov/pdq).

6.2. Income

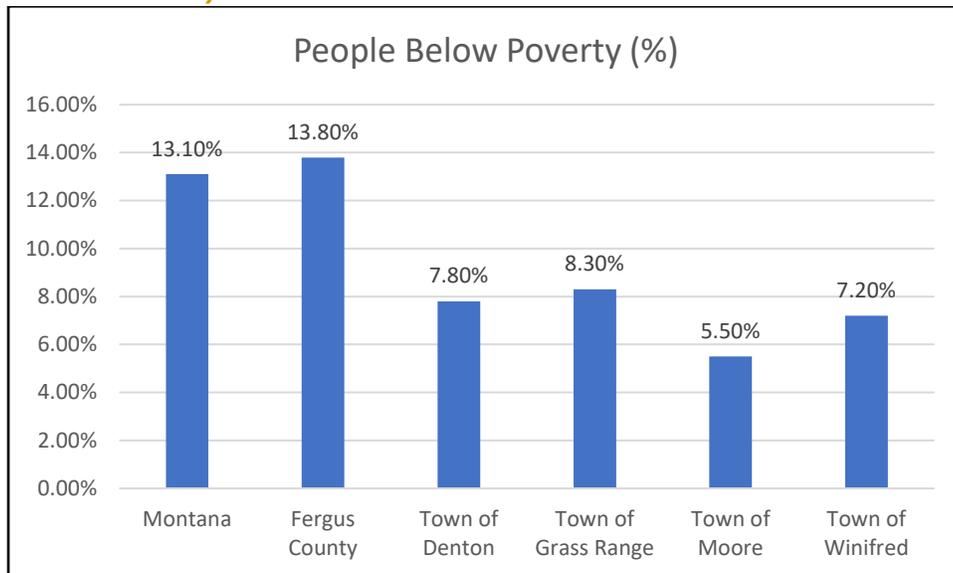
Headwaters Economics reports median household income in 2018 for Fergus County is \$50,327. In the period from 2014-2018, 21.4% of household incomes fell in the range from \$50,000 - \$74,999. 21.3% of household incomes fell below \$25,000.

Table 6.3 Median Income

Income and Benefits (dollars)	Fergus County	Town of Denton	Town of Grass Range	Town of Moore	Town of Winifred
Mean earnings	\$61,951	\$55,777	\$41,328	\$35,222	\$51,373
Mean Social Security income	\$18,594	\$15,835	\$11,876	\$16,231	\$12,525
Mean retirement income	\$19,056	\$14,471	\$14,433	\$18,849	\$17,689
Mean Supplemental Security Income	\$8,971	\$7,000	\$9,650	\$17,750	N/A
Mean cash public assistance income	\$2,936	\$3,600	\$1,363	N/A	N/A
Median family income	\$59,479	\$60,000	\$33,750	\$56,000	\$49,375
Mean family income	\$83,100	\$66,329	\$43,033	\$56,916	\$80,910

Historically, poverty levels in Fergus County are generally less than the national average; however, the County ranks 32nd of 56 counties for poverty levels in Montana.

Table 6.4 Poverty Levels



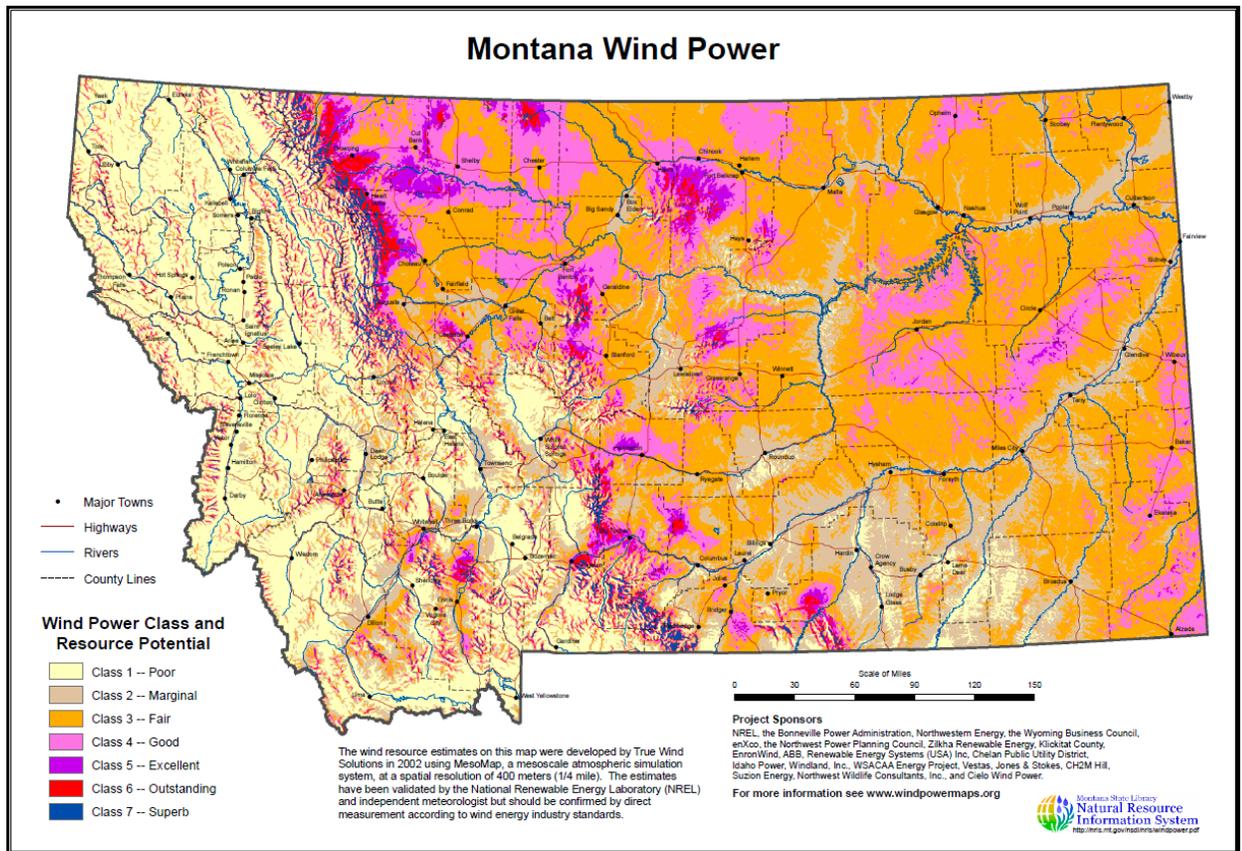
6.3. Future Projections for Economic Development

Declining population in Fergus 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 although through the COVID-19 pandemic there seems to be a migration to more rural areas.

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 agricultural, 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 6.2 Montana Wind Power



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 Fergus County government.

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 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.

Chapter 7. Local Services

7.1. Fire Protection

Fergus County currently has twelve fire departments and fire stations situated throughout the county, which are all volunteer with the exception of Lewistown Fire and Rescue. The following fire departments are location within Fergus County:

Location	Department Type	No. of Firefighters
Denton Rural Fire District	All Volunteer	16
North Fork Flatwillow Rural FD	All Volunteer	9
Cheadle Volunteer Fire Company	All Volunteer	30
Grass Range Rural Fire District	All Volunteer	28
Hilger Rural FD	All Volunteer	27
Lewistown Fire Rescue	Mostly Volunteer	28
Heath Rural FD	All Volunteer	23
Moore Volunteer FD	All Volunteer	44
Roy Rural FD	All Volunteer	32
Winifred Rural FD	All Volunteer	25
Beaver Creek Rural FD	All Volunteer	23
Coffee Creek Rural FD	All Volunteer	13

In addition to the Fergus County services listed above, the incorporated Towns of Denton, Grass Range, and Winifred have fire departments. Mutual aid agreements are currently in place with the counties of Judith Basin, Choteau, Blaine, Phillips, Musselshell, Petroleum, Golden Valley and Wheatland. Federal agencies that offer mutual aid agreements, for both fire suppression equipment and personnel, include the Northeastern Land Office of DNRC,

the Lewistown Field Office of Bureau of Land Management, Lewis and Clark National Forest (USFS) and the CM Russel National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS).

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) North Central Montana District has fire protection responsibility for 3.5 million acres of land within their coverage area. Their Lewistown Station is equipped with three (3) Type 6 engines, a Type 3 helicopter and a 12-person interagency Helitack Module. The Interagency Dispatch Center serves the Department of the Interior, BLM, USFWS, CM Russel NWR, and the Montana DNRC.



In 2004 the County 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 Fergus County are limited to the Fergus County Sheriff, which is located in the City of Lewistown. The Sheriff's Office is responsible for patrolling unincorporated areas of Fergus County, or areas not covered by a municipal police force. The Sheriff's Office maintains a 24-hours a day, 7-days a week schedule with fulltime sworn officers, and reserve deputies. The Office has nine full time sworn officers, 16 part time sworn officers, and a number of civilian employees. The City of Lewistown operates the 911 dispatch for Fergus County, which includes law enforcement, emergency medical calls, and fire calls. The Fergus County Detention Center is also located in Lewistown and serves the entire County. A volunteer search and rescue team is managed and lead by a local volunteer coordinator.

The Fergus County Attorney's Office primarily prosecutes criminal cases; however, they also advise the Board of Commissioners and other public officials regarding public business. The County Attorney's Office employs the County Attorney, the Chief Deputy County Attorney, and two Deputy County attorneys, in addition to support staff.

7.3. Disaster and Emergency Services

The Fergus County Office of Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) is located in the County Courthouse, and is responsible for coordination of the emergency services system, including mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. The DES coordinator serves as a point of contact for all matters involving state assistance with Emergency Management.

Fergus County currently has a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan, adopted in 2014, which aims to reduce or eliminate risks to human life and property due to hazards, including flooding, severe weather, wildland and rangeland fire, and hazardous materials incidents.

In addition, an Emergency Operations Plan was adopted in 2019. This plan establishes the

concept of operations and primary functions for managing disasters and emergencies in Fergus County, Montana including the incorporated Towns Denton, Grass Range, Moore and Winifred. This plan provides an overview of the Fergus County approach to emergency operations and serves as the foundation for standard operating procedures and other agency documents.

DES is also the fire warden and serves as the liaison between rural districts and state and federal resources and any non-districted areas in the County, including a large area in southern Fergus County.

7.4. Public Health

Fergus County is part of the Central Montana Health District, which serves six 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. **Might need to totally update this.**

Central Montana Medical Center (CMMC) and the Central Montana Community Health Center are both privately owned and operated health care facilities located in Lewistown. The CMMC houses 25 acute care beds, employs 271 health care providers, and was named a National Top 20 Critical Access Hospital. The Community Health Center opened in 2008 and provides medical care to residents regardless of income or ability to pay.

Fergus County owned and managed healthcare services include Central Montana Public Health, Central Montana Environmental Health, the Fergus County Nurse's Office, and Central Montana Family Planning.

Central Montana Public Health is governed by the Central Montana Board of Health, and provides Communicable Disease surveillance and prevention, immunization and child health, comprehensive cancer control, and public health emergency preparedness. The Central Montana Environmental Health District aims to improve and protect the health of the population of the same 6-county region and provides local government leadership and advocacy concerning public health issues.

The Fergus County Nurse's Office provides services to the public, including immunizations, walk in blood pressure screening, alcohol and drug screening, and community health fairs.

Central Montana Family Planning has been active in Lewistown for approximately 45 years, and is partially funded by Federal, State and County dollars, with the remaining revenue coming from patient fees and donations. Services are provided for a 6-county region: Fergus, Judith Basin, Petroleum, Golden Valley, Musselshell and Wheatland Counties. 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 Fergus County and surrounding towns often utilize public health facilities in Roundup, Billings and Jordan as well.

Ambulance services are provided by Fergus 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 Fergus County. It is a registered non-profit corporation dedicated to mental health and chemical dependency care in the area.

St. Vincent operates a private medical clinic in Lewistown.

7.5. Social Services

Social services in Fergus 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 Fergus County are primarily supported by the Fergus County Council on Aging (COA). The COA is a private Montana non-profit organization with a dedicated Board of Directors, and provides numerous services, activities and resources for senior citizens in the service area. Primary services include meal services, transportation services, and the operation of their second-hand store. There are no additional senior centers located within Fergus County.

Fergus County is also served 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.

7.6. Education

Fergus County currently has four public school districts, located in the incorporated Towns of Denton, Grass Range, Moore and Winifred. Pam to check on current # of students with Superintendent.

Location	Approximate No. of Students
Denton Elementary School	63
Denton High School	36
Grass Range Elementary	33
Grass Range High School	19
Moore Elementary School	64
Moore High School	47
Roy K-12	47
Winifred K-12 School	69

The high school graduation rate in the County is approximately 92.3%, which is significantly higher than the state average of 87%.

University of Providence offers classes in Lewistown for the prerequisite year of the Associate of Science Degree in Nursing. Students that begin the program in Lewistown will complete the program on campus in Great Falls, Montana.

7.7. Noxious Weed Management

Weed management is provided by Fergus County as a public service, as it is a critical service for the agricultural and recreational industries in the County. In addition to spray services, the Weed Department provides equipment rental and chemical sales, assists with establishing monitoring programs, and assists landowners with securing funds for noxious weed management.

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 Fergus Conservation District is located within the North Central Conservation District, Region 3, and is governed by a non-paid, nonpartisan board of elected supervisors. The Board of Supervisors is comprised of seven individuals and the Advisory to the District contains three members. 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, Century Link, and Triangle Telephone are the local carriers providing communication service to Fergus County. Mid-Rivers provides local phone service, high speed internet, cable television, and cellular telephone service. Triangle Telephone provides high speed internet and cellular telephone services. Additional cell service carriers that receive service within Fergus County include Verizon and T-Mobile. Most rural residents are dependent on satellite service for television. In 2015, Triangle Telephone was awarded \$30 million to improve high speed internet services in rural Montana, and new fiber-optic lines were planned for 16 counties, including Fergus County. Currently, a large portion of the County has fiber internet service available to them.

7.10. Future Need for Additional or Improved Services

It is anticipated that 22% of the population in Fergus 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.

An identified need is for volunteer emergency service personnel. Given the requirements to serve in that capacity and the difficulty in recruiting new volunteers, the number of residents willing to provide that service has decreased.

Additional advanced education opportunities offered in Fergus County would be welcome as a means to attract and retain younger residents of the County.

7.11. Goals and Objectives

GOAL

Promote public health and social services in Fergus County and the Towns of Denton, Grass Range, Moore and Winifred to serve the needs of the citizens.

OBJECTIVES

- Identify incentives that could be provided to volunteers as a way to draw them to the County.
- Endorse a community paramedics training program.
- Work with the State (find out who regulates this) to develop reasonable requirements for volunteer emergency personnel. Kathy to research.
- 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 Fergus County and the Towns of Denton, Grass Range, Moore and Winifred.

OBJECTIVES

- Encourage volunteers for fire and emergency services.
- Encourage community involvement in supporting emergency services provided by the local volunteer fire departments.
- 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.

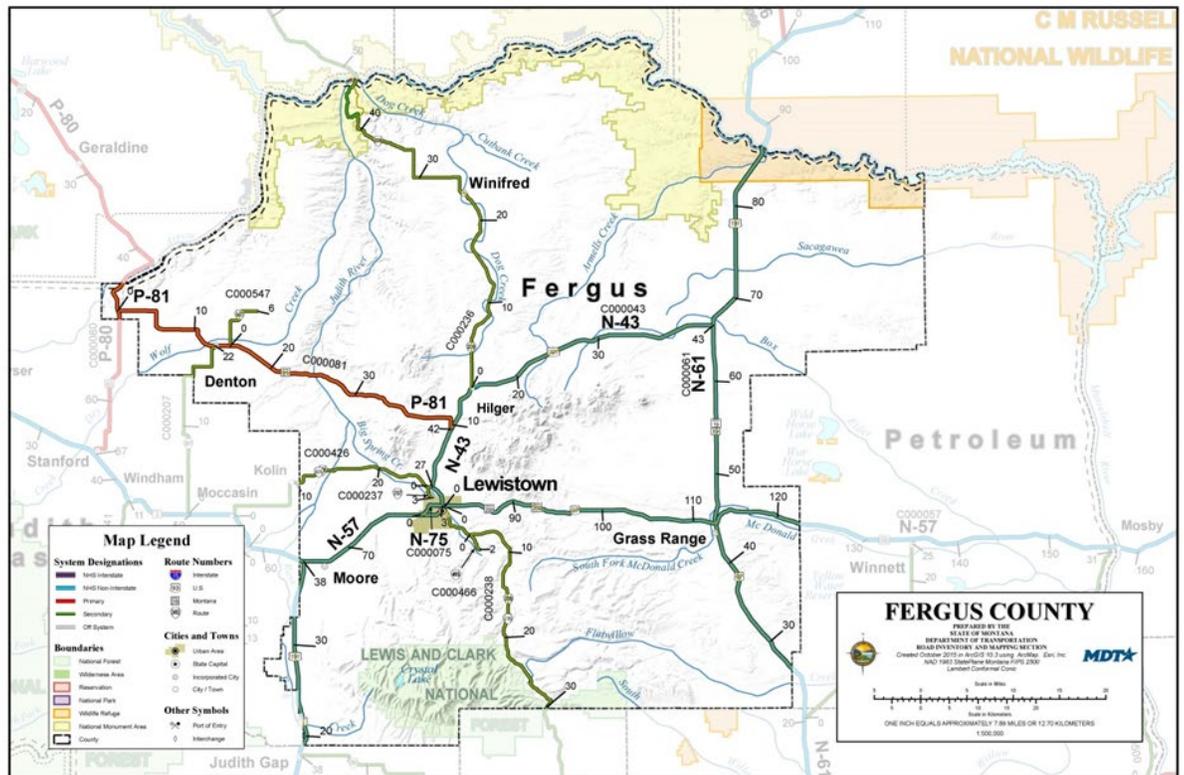
OBJECTIVES

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.

Chapter 8. Public Facilities

8.1. Transportation

Figure 8.1 MDT-Fergus County



Fergus 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.

Fergus County has an extensive network of local roads that are under the jurisdiction of the Montana Department of Transportation and the Fergus County Road Department. While the roads under County jurisdiction have not been inventoried, the Road Department estimates that they are responsible for approximately 1,700 miles of roads, as well as 250 miles of missile roads, which must be maintained to a higher standard than county roads due to the vehicle load requirements.

Roads located within the County that are maintained by the State of Montana include:

Table 8.1 State of Montana Roadways in Fergus County

Route	Location	Miles
US Highway 191 (NHS Route 43)	Lewistown to Junction with US Highway 87	42.8
Montana Highway 200 (NHS Route 57)	Central Fergus County (From Great Falls east through the County)	58.5
US Highway 87 (NHS Route 61)	Southeast Fergus County north to Malta	61.4

Montana Highway 3 (NHS Route 63)	Connecting Judith Gap to Montana Highway 200	16.7
Primary Route 81	Beginning west of Denton, continuing east to US Highway 191	42.4
Secondary Route 207	Hobson (Judith Basin County) to Denton	6.4
Secondary Route 236	Hilger to Winifred, continuing north to Blaine County	46.9
Secondary Route 238	Lewistown south to Ryegate	30.3
Secondary Route 426	Connecting Hobson and Lewistown, north of US Highway 87	16.2
Secondary Route 466	From the intersection with Route 238 south	2
Secondary Route 547	Denton north	6

Fergus County also has a number of bridges, broken into the following categories:

- Major Structure: bridges greater than 20-feet in length, which are inspected biennially by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT). Based on current MDT records, there are approximately 191 bridges in this category located in Fergus County. Of these 191 bridges, 88 bridges are the responsibility of Fergus County.
- Minor Structure: bridges less than 20-feet in length, which are not inspected regularly by MDT or Fergus County crews. There are currently 17 bridges in this category that are the responsibility of Fergus County.

Although major structures are inspected by MDT, depending on the location of the bridge, they may be the fiscal responsibility of Fergus County for repair or replacement.

The MDT Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for 2021-2025 lists the following projects located within Fergus County, currently in the Construction Phase:

- Roy-West: 8.4 miles of overlay on US-191
- SF 169 N57 SLDR WID & SLP FLAT: 3.29 miles of shoulder widening and slope flattening on MT-200 and US-87
- MT_200 Bridges-Lewistown Area: Bridge replacement on 1.99 miles of MT 200 and US-87

8.2. Water Supply

The Missouri River forms the northern border of Fergus County, and the Judith River winds its way through the county before terminating at the Missouri. Lakes and storage reservoirs located in the County include Stafford Reservoir, East Fork Reservoir, Carters Pond and Crystal Lake. Big Spring Creek, Cottonwood Creek and Warm Spring Creek are three primary creeks that typically run year around providing irrigation and stock water.

Fergus County does not currently operate any public water systems; however, municipal public water systems exist in Denton, Grass Range, Moore, Roy, and Winifred. There are seven additional water systems classified as community systems throughout the county, with four of those located at Hutterite Colonies. Each of these systems is managed by the community they serve, with no assistance from Fergus County. Drinking water throughout the rest of the County is provided primarily by individual wells.

Table 8.2 Drinking Water Sources in Fergus County

Location	Water Source	Population Served
Town of Denton	(4) Springs, (1) Well	255
Town of Grass Range	(2) Artesian Wells	102
Town of Moore	Well	186
Roy Water & Sewer District	(2) Wells	110
Town of Winifred	(2) Wells	206

Statistics from the Ground Water Information Center of the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology indicate 3,955 total wells in Fergus County, with 1,931 being for domestic use and 1,597 used for stock water. 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 8.3 Fergus County New Wells

County Well Data per Year (New Wells Only)	Number
2020	64
2019	104
2018	68
2017	72
2016	36
2015	38
2014	30
2013	32
2012	52
2011	87

Table 8.4 Fergus County Well Usage

Type of Well	Number
Unknown	131
Recreational	1
Industrial	28
Public Water Supply	52
Test Well	7
Unused	13
Wildlife	3
Fire Protection	4
Medical	1
Monitoring	684
Commercial	6
Research	19
Geothermal-Extraction	2
Open System	1
Geotech	116
Geothermal-Injection	1
Stock Water	1597
1931	118
Total*	4911
*Number may be different from County total since one well may have several reported water uses.	

8.3. Wastewater Treatment

Fergus County does not operate any public wastewater systems. Public wastewater treatment and collection systems are located in Denton, Grass Range, Moore, Roy, and Winifred while the remainder of the County utilizes individual septic systems.

Individual county residents with septic systems are permitted by Montana DEQ and/or the County Sanitarian.

8.4. Fergus County Courthouse

The Fergus County Courthouse was constructed in 1912 and is home to a number of County Departments, including the County Nurse, the County Planning Department, and the County Commissioners.

8.5. Town Hall/Fire Hall/EMS

The Town of Denton has a Community Center and Library, which also houses the Town offices. It has a large meeting room used by the various services and the city council for monthly meetings. Denton maintains a Fire Hall/Emergency Services Building, which is located in the center of town and houses the equipment for the ambulance service as well as the fire department service.

Grass Range town services share a facility with the Grass Range Volunteer Fire Department. Directly across Main Street is the facility for the Grass Range Volunteer Ambulance, Quick Rescue Unit and Rural Fire.

The community of Moore maintains government offices adjacent to the U.S. Post Office on Fergus Avenue. The local fire department facilities are located one block southeast of the town offices.

The Town of Winifred maintains a Community Center, which houses the local museum, library, town hall offices, and the ambulance facility.

8.6. Airport

Fergus County operates a small airport two miles southwest of Lewistown. While the airport is serviced by two aviation companies, airplanes are used for a variety of purposes in this expansive county including ambulance service, crop spraying, fire safety, tourism, and business.

The Town of Denton and the Town of Winifred also have public airports. Both airports are available for public use and are unattended airports with one turf runway and no airport communication tower. The airport in Winifred has fuel available, as well as hangars and tiedowns for parking.

8.7. Cemetery

There are approximately 22 cemeteries scattered about Fergus 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 Ruckman Family Cemetery, the Strouf Pioneer Cemetery, or the Ayers Ranch Colony Cemetery. The Town of Denton has two local

cemeteries, the Town of Grass Range has three nearby cemeteries, the Town of Moore has two cemeteries, and the Town of Winifred has four neighboring cemeteries.

8.8. County/Town Shops

The primary site of the Fergus County Road and Bridge Department is in Lewistown, with district shops located in Denton, Grass Range, Moore, Roy and Winifred.

8.9. Refuse Site

Residential and commercial refuse collection in Fergus County is managed by Republic Services. They operate a transfer station, located in Lewistown, which acts as an intermediate collection location for local waste trucks prior to the shipment of waste to regional landfills. Republic Services provides residential, as well as small and large containers for business customers.

8.10. Library

Public libraries within Fergus County are located in the towns of Denton, Winifred and Moore.

8.11. Community Senior Centers

The Fergus County Council on Aging is located in Lewistown and is partnered with the Area II Agency on Aging to provide services to the citizens of Fergus County. The Council has a 10-member board that oversees the operation of the facility and currently employs 6 staff members. In addition to staff, the programs are served by over 100 volunteers, performing services such as kitchen and meal service, front desk assistance, and staffing the Treasure Depot, which is a secondhand store run by the Council on Aging.

Some Federal and State funding is available to underwrite the meals and activities of County organizations. The primary services of the Council on Aging include meal services, transportation services and the operation of the secondhand store, The Treasure Depot.

8.12. Future Need for Additional or Improved Facilities

It is estimated that 21% of the population in Fergus County is 65 years of age and older, indicating that the demand for community senior centers and ADA compliant facilities will continue to increase. The aging population within the incorporated towns of Fergus County is slightly less than the overall county percentage.

Table 8.5 % of Population 65 and over

Location	% of Population 65 and over
Denton	15.6
Grass Range	14.8
Moore	11.9
Winifred	18

8.13. Goals and Objectives

GOAL

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

OBJECTIVES

- Prepare and utilize Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) for Fergus County.
- Continue to update CCIP annually as County needs change.
- Support upgrades of public facilities for ADA compliance. Investigate opportunities for assistance for private upgrades.
- Support the Towns of Denton, Moore, Grass Range and Winifred 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.

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. MCEP, 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 to take advantage of MDT road, bridge, and transportation alternative programs.
- Stay apprised of funding opportunities.

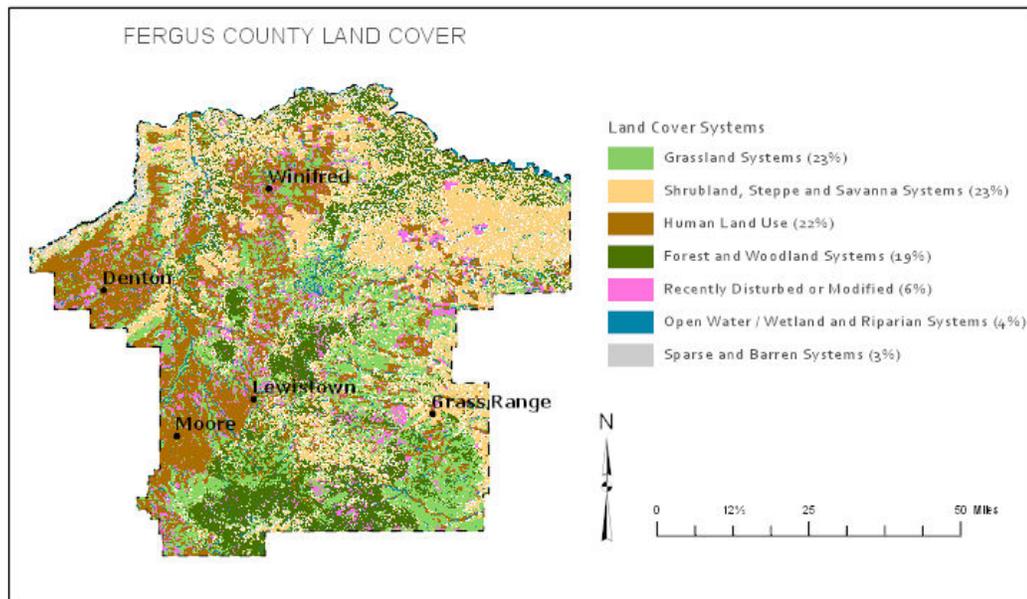
Chapter 9. Natural Resources

Fergus County's Land Use Plan, revised in June 2021 and attached as an appendix to this Growth Policy, addresses land use management issues directly and guides the development and management of the county's natural resources, particularly to assist federal land state land management agencies. That document "in compliance with federal statutes, federal and state agencies to the extent bound by federal law and regulation shall inform local governments of all pending actions affecting local communities and citizens and coordinate with them in the planning and implementation of those actions. The Fergus County Commission, when affected by such actions, shall be consulted and coordinated with in accordance with the constitutions and Laws of Montana and the United States and the Charter of Fergus County."⁵

Some sections of this Chapter will refer to the contents of the Land Use Plan.

9.1. Land Cover

Fergus County land cover is comprised of island mountain ranges in the central and south and the Missouri Breaks to the north, with expansive agricultural land and prairie land. Land cover classified by the U.S. Geological Survey, Fergus County primarily consisting 23% of Grassland (lowland/prairie grassland). 23% Shrubland (sagebrush and shrubland), 22% Human Land Use (Agriculture, developed areas, and mining and resource extraction), and 19% Forest systems (conifer-dominated forest, deciduous-dominated forest, and mixed forest). 6% Recently Disturbed or Modified is land covered altered or disturbed by introduced annual or biennial, such as knapweed or Canada thistle, as well as land cover recently modified by fire, or insect killed forest. 4% Open Water/ Wetland includes all riparian, marsh areas, and open water The map below represents the total Land Cover Systems, distributed in Fergus County.²



⁵ Fergus County Land Use Plan Revised June 2021

² Montana Natural Heritage Program

9.2. Rivers, Streams, Lakes, Wetlands and Watersheds

Nine subbasin watersheds make up the two watershed basins in Fergus County - Fort Peck Reservoir Basin and the Musselshell Basin. Two significant rivers found in the county are the Missouri River and Judith River. Countless intermittent and perennial streams flow into the Missouri River, Judith River, or Musselshell River.

Countless small freshwater and saline wetlands, lakes, and reservoirs are scattered across the county, many within private property. Notable lakes and reservoirs which provide recreational opportunities include the East Fork Reservoir, the Upper Carters and Carters Pond near Lewistown. Crystal Lake, a natural lake tucked back in the Big Snowy Mountains.

Fergus County adopted Floodplain Hazard Management Regulations in December of 2014 with the purpose of protecting the public health, safety, and general welfare of county residents and to minimize public and private losses due to flooding. These regulations determined and delineated flood hazard areas known as Regulated Flood Hazard Areas in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservations (DNRC) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

The Fergus County Land Use Plan (Appendix ??) “recognizes that the protection and development of its water resources are essential to its short and long term economic and cultural viability. Fergus County shall recognize, within the context of customs and cultures, the use and development of private rights and shall require, to the extent mandated by law, full compliance in the acceptance and enforcement of such designations, and final adjudication of existing rights in a timely manner.” It provides guidelines related for State and Federal agencies as they propose designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers, and all federal and state policies or management plans that address riparian management, waterways, and wetlands in the County.

9.3. Fish and Wildlife

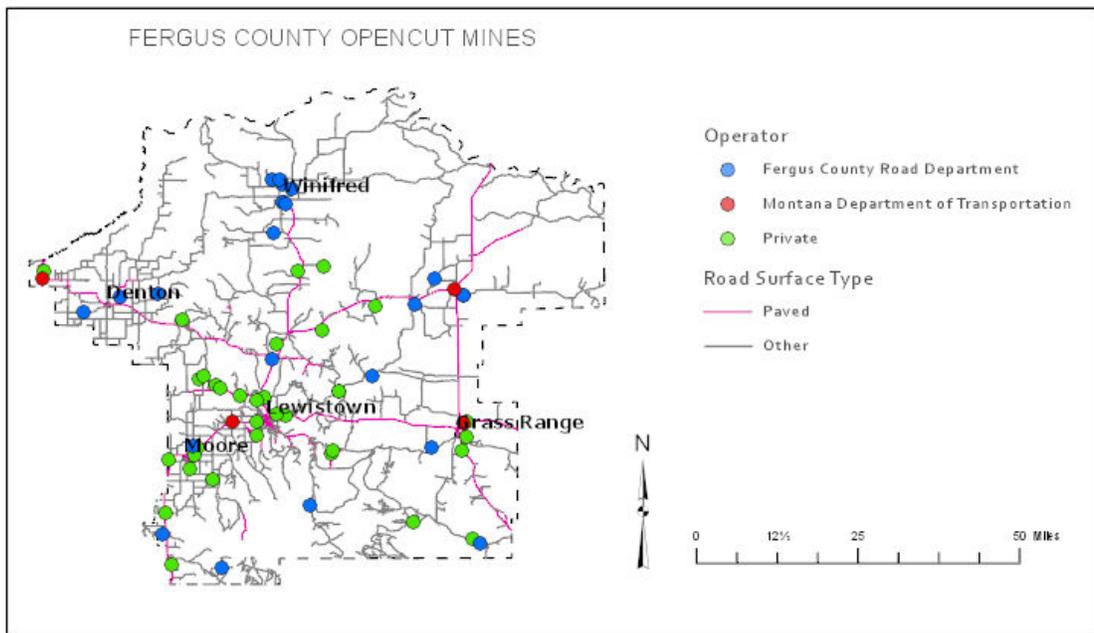
Fish and wildlife are abundant in the rough and diverse landscapes found in Fergus County. Multiple State and Federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management, Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks manage critical habitat around the county. A large area of protected areas within the Upper Missouri National Wild and Scenic River and Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument provides vital habitats for an assortment of birds, fish, waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles. Turkeys, upland birds, mule deer, antelope and larger big game such as elk and bighorns roam from the river banks to the high plains. Predators also inhabit the regions such as coyotes, fox, badgers, and mountain lions.

The Fergus County Land Use Plan, revised in June 2021, states that “Fergus County shall promote wildlife opportunities compatible with local customs and cultures and within the constraints of private property rights and local self-determination.” It provides guidelines regarding wildlife and endangered species. There have been initiatives by private landowners to establish bison/buffalo in areas of Fergus County. Included as

appendices are an Ordinance for the Protection of Soil and Water from Wild, Free Roaming or Domestic Bison Grazing in Fergus Conservation District, adopted October, 2016 and Resolution No. 3-2016 of the Fergus County Board of County Commissioners. These documents provide policies for transporting and raising bison and establish that buffalo/bison are not considered as domestic livestock in Fergus County.

9.4. Sand and Gravel Resources

Fergus County has a total of 60 permitted opencut mines and one pending request for permit. Of these 60, 22 are operated by the Fergus County Road Department, four are operated by Montana Department of Transportation, and the remaining 34 open-cut mines are privately operated. As shown in the figure below, opencut mines operated by the County are geographically spread throughout the county, with a heavy concentration around Winifred.



9.5. Wildland-Urban Interface

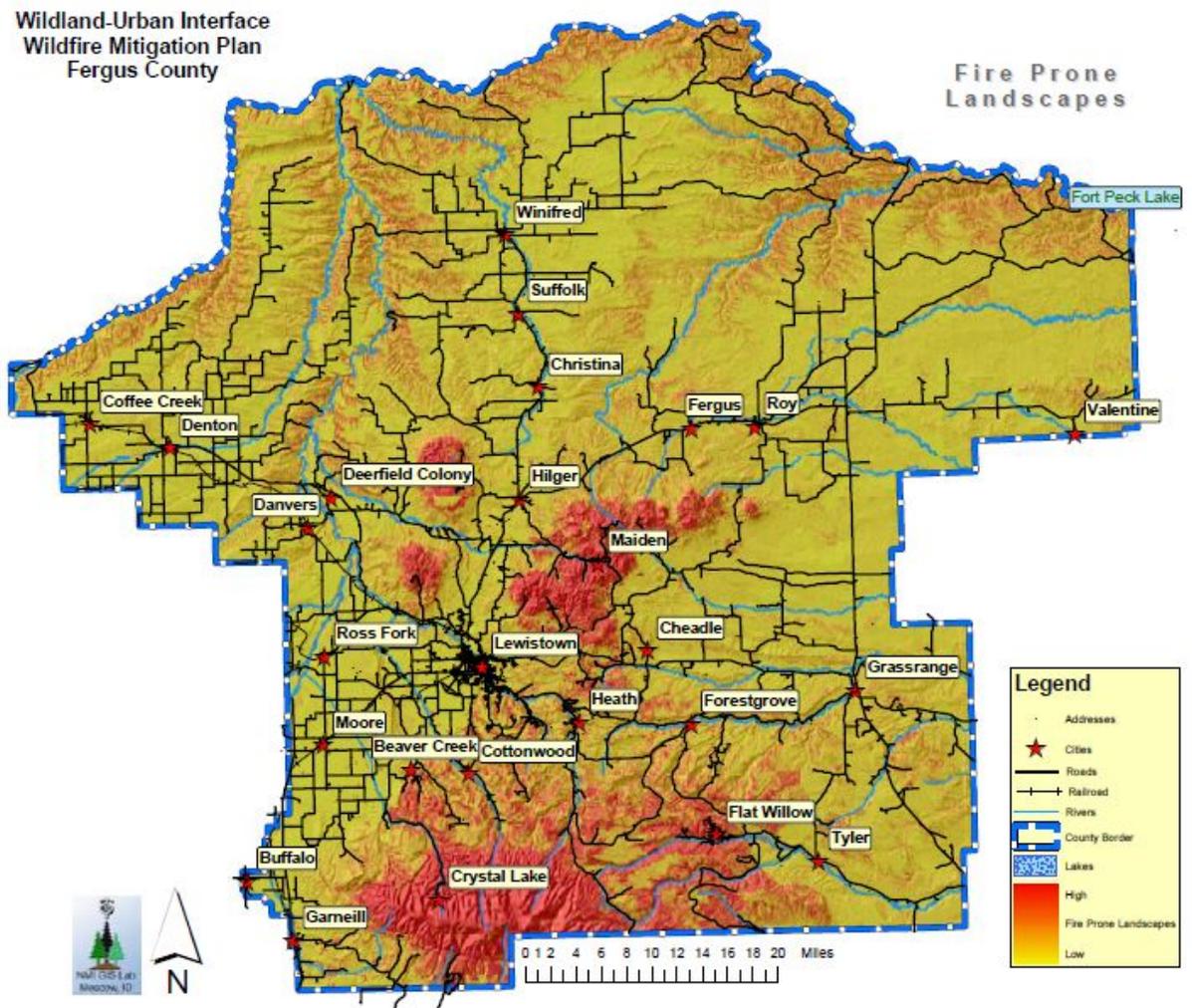
The wildland-Urban Interface refers to the areas where wildland areas meet human or urban developed areas, or where forest fuels meet urban fuels. In 2004, Fergus County adopted the Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan in conjunction with a variety of organizations and agencies. This plan reports important findings of Wildfire Hazard Profiles, Community Risk Assessments, Community Preparedness and Treatment Recommendations for rural Fergus County and individual communities.

Historical fire records since the 1980 indicate that nearly 73% of all fires in the County have been ignited by nature and the remaining 27% being human caused. Natural ignition of wildland fires is generally during lightning storms in the July, August, and September months. It is mentioned in the report that most homes in rural Fergus County are at a low to moderate risk from wildland fires due to mixing of scattered natural rangeland/forestland

fuels with dispersed ranching and housing development. A larger concern falls along the Upper Missouri River Break due the combinations of varying topography and natural fuels, however very few structures and communities exist in the area and poses a moderate risk.

The figure below comes from the Fergus County Wildland-Urban Interface Wildfire Mitigation Plan to represent Fire Prone Landscapes in the county. The methodology used to depict the below figures is a combination of factors including past fire occurrence, vegetation cover type, and topography characteristics.

Figure 3.3. Fire Prone Landscapes in Fergus County, Montana.



9.6. Mining

Fergus County developed a rich history in mining dating back to when Gold was discovered in the Judith Mountains in the 1880's. This led to the establishment of several boom towns including Gilt Edge, Kendall, and Maiden. Gilt Edge is notable for becoming one of the first mining operation to utilize the newly developed cyanide process. Gilt Edge peaked in 1908 and slowly declined to its shut down in 1991. Reported by the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology, Fergus County has a total of 180 abandoned/inactive mines. A majority of

these abandoned/inactive mines where lode claims searching or discovering mineralized rocks, while a few other mines for exaction of coal, silica, and limestone.

Currently there are no active or prospecting coal permits, although the Judith River Formation is known to have coal resources. Warm Spring Mining District located northeast of Lewiston is still active with two gold mining operations. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservations GIS data reports 394 permitted and approved wells in Fergus County. Of those 394 wells, 340 are dry hole which do not contain and oil or gas quantities, 34 wells are producing gas, 2 wells are producing oil, and the remaining are either test sites, for disposal, water source or unknown.⁶

Refer to the Fergus County Land Use Plan (Appendix ??) regarding guidelines related to mining, natural resources and renewable energy. The Plan generally states that “Fergus County recognizes that the development of its abundant mineral, renewable energy and natural resources are economically desirable. It is the policy of Fergus County to promote long term availability and responsible development of its minerals, renewable energy, and natural resources.” The Plan’s appendix includes a copy of *The Mining Law: Summary*.

9.7. Energy

The majority of electric production in Montana is by coal and hydroelectric facilities with about 7.5% produced by renewable wind energy. Montana currently has 13 operational wind projects utilizing 20 different sites. Many of these sites are in close proximity to Fergus County located in Judith Basin County, Wheatland County, and Meagher County. Fergus County does not have any energy producing sites.

9.8. Climate and Soils

Fergus County is generally experiencing warm summers with average temperatures of 80-95 degrees Fahrenheit with extreme temperatures reaching up to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Winter months consist of long and colder weather caused by artic air moving from the north. Temperatures during the winter on average reach a low of 30 degrees Fahrenheit with extreme low temperatures reaching well into the negatives. Average annual rainfall totals to about 17.5 inches along with an average annual snowfall of 67 inches per year.

Soils in Fergus County vary due to diverse topography. As described in the Fergus County Soil Survey published by United States Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service in 1988, 20 general map units were found. These 20 general map units are grouped into five broad groups; soils on flood plains and low terraces make up about 3% of the county, soils mainly on terraces and along the edges of terraces make up about 15.5% of the county, soils on uplands make up about 61.5% of the county, soils on the mountain foothills make up about 10% of the county, and finally soils on mountainsides and uplands make up about 10% of the county.

9.9. Future Projections

⁶ [Board of Oil and Gas Conservation — Montana DNRC \(mt.gov\)](http://mt.gov)

Fergus County will continue to cherish traditions and protect all its natural resource, local customs and the private property rights of their residents. The County does not anticipate land cover to change and will continue to foster current operation production of its natural resource and potentially tap into hosting wind energy sites.

9.10. Goals and Objectives

TBD

Ensure private property rights are considered in decisions.

Chapter 10. Recreational Access

10.1. Access Sites

Fergus County has many recreational opportunities including hunting, fishing, boating, and hiking. The Lewis and Clark National Forest manages approximately 563,432 acres of land within the Big Snowy and Little Snowy Mountains including the Big Snow Wilderness Study Area. The Crystal Lake area is among the most popular destinations in the Big Snowy Mountains providing a campground, rental cabin, miles of trails for hiking and horseback riding to the cascades, an ice cave, and alpine mountain peaks.

The Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument and Charles M. Russel National Wildlife Refuge provides multiple historic cultural sites, natural landmarks, boating and fishing opportunities along the Missouri River. The Missouri Breaks Back County Byway offers an alternative travel route to enjoy the Missouri River Breaks. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks hosts a total of 10 fishing access sites along Big Spring Creek, Casino Creek, and Burnette Creek with close proximity to Lewistown.

Denton provides excellent opportunities for game bird hunters. Grass Range is within close proximity to the War Horse National Wildlife Refuge consisting of three units for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, and boating. Bear Gulch Pictographs is a unique attraction for all ages to gaze upon thousands of paintings and etchings depicted by Natives Americans long before settlers made their way to Fergus County. Moore provides an excellent hub for access to island mountains such as the Big Snowy and Little Snowy Mountains as well as the Little Belts and Highwood Mountains. The Judith River flows north of Moore allowing for excellent water recreation. Winifred is a grand place to start or end your float trip along the Missouri River or Judith River. Winifred also offers historical experience of the McClelland Ferry crossing and the Winifred Museum.

Can we have individuals from these towns provide more information.

10.2. Local Recreational Facilities

Fergus County owns and operates a fairgrounds utilized for the Central Montana Fair but used year around for various events. Services available at the fairgrounds include stall facilities for horses and livestock, camping spots with facilities, wedding facilities, outdoor picnic and gazebo areas, outdoor and indoor arenas for horse and livestock use, event rental facilities, and a covered grandstand with arena usable as a vendor venue.



Moore public schools provides park amenities such as a playground, basketball courts, and a track/ football field. They also have a City Park. The Grass Range City Park and public school have a playground as well as a basketball court and community garden. Denton provides a city park hosting multiple baseball fields, a track and football field, a basketball court and playground. Winifred is currently upgrading its public school building along with its associated park and sports field.

10.3. Issues Identified

Hunting and fishing are the primary local and tourist attraction in Fergus County. These activities create heavily used county roads. Most county roads to public land are gravel or natural material, causing maintenance and upkeep of those road to be of primary concern especially given the limited funding available to local governments for upkeep of transportation facilities.

Likewise, limited resources also limit the presence of law enforcement in the field to mitigate illegal actives associated with hunting and fishing which can lead to conflicts between local landowners and the general public.

10.4. Projections for Future Access

The use of land managed by state and federal agencies will continue to increase due to the popularity of outdoor recreation and changes in regulations and wildlife population. This may create management challenges for agencies and any management changes to deal with those challenges often take an excessive amount of time due to required public processes and conflicts related to land use.

An Executive Order issued by President Joseph Biden in January 2021 titled “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad” includes a “30X30” Plan (recently rebranded as America the Beautiful) with a goal to develop a program to conserve at least 30% of the lands and waters in the United States by 2030. In alignment with its Land Use Plan (Appendix ??) Fergus County’s Board of County Commissioners passed Resolution No. 16-2021 opposing the Federal Government’s “30X30” Land Preservation Goal. That resolution is included in Appendix ??.

The County’s intent in opposing the goal is to continue to support private ownership of land in Fergus County, oppose the designation of public land in a manner that would restrict public access, and support the use of public lands for multiple uses. If enacted, the Board

believes it would threaten the well-being, health, safety, economy, and culture of Fergus County, its businesses and citizens.

10.5. Goals and Objectives

TBD

Chapter 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 local governments will cooperate with other jurisdictional entities in implementing its growth policy. Since this Policy is a cooperative effort between Fergus County and the Towns of Denton, Grass Range, Moore, and Winifred, this policy will be implemented by each of those entities.

The City of Lewistown and a 4 ½ mile jurisdictional area surrounding the City are part of the City of Lewistown Growth Policy area as defined by interlocal agreement between the City of Lewistown and Fergus County. Therefore, the two documents, are implemented as separate policy areas.

A City-County Planning Board has planning responsibilities for the City of Lewistown and the 4 ½ mile jurisdictional area surrounding the City. This Board also serves as a Zoning Commission for the City of Lewistown. All other areas of the county are the responsibility of the Fergus County Planning Board.

Both the City-County Planning Board and the County Planning Board have duties and responsibilities described in by-laws that outline the relationship of the Boards to the respective governing bodies, meetings, membership, powers, and duties including their relationship with Planning Staff. In addition, these boards are responsible for developing a Growth Policy for their jurisdictions.

Pam to review this section:

Per the Fergus County Subdivision Regulations 2006 and Montana Code Annotated 2011, when a proposed subdivision lies within the boundaries of an incorporated city or town, the application and preliminary plat must be submitted to and approved by the city or town governing body. When a proposed subdivision lies partly within an incorporated city or town, the application and preliminary plat must be submitted to, and approved by, both the city or town and county governing body.

When a proposed subdivision is to be annexed into any incorporated city or town, the governing bodies shall coordinate the subdivision review process and annexation procedures whenever possible.

When a proposed subdivision is situated entirely in an unincorporated area, the application and preliminary plat shall be submitted to and approved by the governing body of the county. However, if a proposed subdivision lies within 2 miles of an incorporated second class city, or within 1 mile of an incorporated third class city, the county governing body must submit the application and preliminary plat to the city or town governing body or its designated agent for review and comment.

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 Fergus County. Agencies including the BLM, USFS, DNRC, and USFWS, and FWP occupy nearly one quarter of the land in the county (see Land Use Section of this document).

Fergus County has adopted a Land Use Plan (**Appendix ??**) that mandates “all federal and state agencies shall consider, to the maximum extent required by law, the Fergus County Land Use Policy and coordinate with the County Commission for the purpose of planning and managing federal and state lands within the geographic boundaries of Fergus County, Montana.” The Policy is intended to assist federal and state land management agencies in developing and implementing their management actions to coordinate with the land management goals of Fergus County and its citizens. Primarily, those goals are “to protect the customs and cultures of county citizens through protection of private property rights, the facilitation of a free market economy, and the establishment of a process to ensure self-determination by Fergus County residents.”

Chapter 12. Implementation Plan

12.1. 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 Fergus County Growth Policy as well as compliance with subdivision regulations 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 in 2014. **Pam: have you updated these regulations with any legislative changes since 2014?**

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

Fergus 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 Fergus County Planning Office in the 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.

Pam: is there any zoning in Fergus Co?

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:

- MCEP=Montana Coal 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 (TSEP): planning and construction grants for infrastructure including bridges, water systems, and wastewater systems, solid waste management, and storm water 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 Fergus 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:

- Status of goals, objectives and actions suggested in the Growth Policy.
- Recommendation/assessment of goals to be addressed in the following year.
- 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 snap shot 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)

Insert goals and objectives tables here.