



*Growth Policy Update*

# **MADISON COUNTY**



February 2025



# MADISON COUNTY

## Growth Policy Update

Adopted \_\_\_\_\_ via Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

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# INTRODUCTION



## WHAT IS A GROWTH POLICY?

A growth policy is a guiding document adopted by a city, town or county that outlines the community’s vision for its future. Similar to what other states call master plans, a growth policy is used by local governments to guide decision making about the community’s land use and development. A growth policy is not a regulatory document and does not require regulations to be adopted and utilized. But if the community chooses to adopt land use regulations, they must be consistent with and supported by the growth policy.

Madison County first adopted a Comprehensive Plan, a long-range plan similar to a growth policy, in 1973. This growth policy is Madison County’s vision and plan for the next five years, through 2030. Through community surveys, community forums, and other outreach, Madison County residents have identified our community’s strengths and weaknesses, and have detailed plans for improvement. The Board of County Commissioners and Planning Board will implement these plans through thoughtful consideration and will reference the growth policy when making decisions or taking regulatory actions. This growth policy also prepares Madison County for competitive grant funding opportunities, as it demonstrates commitment to an intentional and planned future.

## SNAPSHOT OF MADISON COUNTY

Madison County, Montana, was one of the nine original counties of the Territory of Montana. Founded in 1865 and named after President James Madison, Madison County is currently the thirteenth largest county in Montana, by square miles.

Madison County is a recreationist’s dream, hosting endless opportunities for fishing, hiking, and hunting. The County’s history is steeped in mining and ranching, with 109,000 acres classified as prime farmland. The area was historically occupied by Native Americans, predominately Shoshone and Bannock tribes, followed by small hunter/gatherer groups called ‘Sheepaters’. Madison County is rich in history, including evidence and sites related to Native American presence, the Lewis and Clark expedition, gold mining, stock growing and agriculture.

Farming, ranching and tourism are the main economic drivers today. Madison County is home to four incorporated towns, including Sheridan, Twin Bridges, Virginia City (County seat), and Ennis, and multiple unincorporated communities, including Harrison, Pony, Mammoth, Norris, Jefferson Island, Cameron, Silver Star, Waterloo, Alder and Big Sky.

Although a mecca for history, Madison County is a large, diverse community with a rich agricultural landscape and some of the most notable fishing rivers in the nation. Surrounded and split by multiple mountain ranges, each corner of the county offers different challenges and opportunities for residents.

# INTRODUCTION



## PLANNING AREA

Madison County consists of 2.3 million acres, including 3,587 square miles of land and 16 square miles of water. The Madison County planning area includes all land and unincorporated community areas within the boundaries of the Madison County jurisdictional line. Madison County is situated west of Gallatin County, east of Beaverhead County, and south of Jefferson and Silver Bow counties.

## PLANNING EFFORTS

Madison County encourages and supports development that meets the County's guiding principles, goals and objectives. For many years Madison County has been proactively working to improve the quality of life for its residents through thoughtful planning. These planning efforts include:

- 2012 Growth Policy
- 2025 Subdivision Regulations
- 2016 Capital Improvements Plan
- 2014 Airport Affected Area Regulations
- 2024 Floodplain Development Regulations
- 2004 Big Hole River Conservation Permit
- 2023 Housing Needs Assessment (not adopted)
- 2024 Community Wildfire Protection Plan
- 2009 Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan
- 2013 Pre-Construction Safety Review
- 2025 County Road and Bridge Standards (in process)
- Multiple community plans



This Growth Policy is the County's comprehensive effort to tie many different planning projects into one document and to look five years into the future. The document contains nine sections all of which provide the basis for achieving the goals developed by the County Planning Board and Madison County residents. These sections include:

# INTRODUCTION

Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This section provides a succinct list of the County’s guiding principles, goals and objectives, collated from public outreach and work sessions.</li></ul>
Population Characteristics and Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• An analysis of the County’s population characteristics and local economy, including demographics, employment, income, and poverty.</li></ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The status of the County’s current housing stock, including availability and affordability.</li></ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This section includes a discussion about current land use.</li></ul>
Local Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A description of the services the County provides, including local government, law enforcement, fire protection, health care, transportation, libraries and museums, and schools.</li></ul>
Public Facilities and Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A description of the County’s public facilities and the infrastructure it maintains, including the status of water, wastewater, stormwater, solid waste, parks, fairgrounds, and utilities.</li></ul>
Natural and Cultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion of present natural and cultural resources within the County, including climate, water resources, floodplains, wildlife, hazard areas, sand and gravel resources, wildfire risk (WUI), and cultural resources.</li></ul>
Madison County Geographical Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Description of the multiple geographical communities within Madison County and concerns, based on geographical location, natural resources, and lifestyle.</li></ul>
Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The steps the County may take to achieve the goals identified in this document.</li></ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussion on resident outreach, adoption and implementation of this document, timing for review and revision, interjurisdictional coordination, and the subdivision review criteria</li></ul>



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following are the guiding principles, goals and objectives that were developed to address the opportunities and needs identified during the update of this plan. The specific actions that the County will take to achieve these goals, responsibility for those actions, and timeframes are detailed in the Action Plan section of this document. Because of the diversity and large geographical size of Madison County, we have identified goals, objectives, and actions for the County, as a whole, in addition to general communities, as determined by geographical location

## MADISON COUNTY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Preserve existing open space.
2. Protect wildlife habitat.
3. Preserve natural resources; specifically, water resources.
4. Provide for affordable housing.
5. Respect private property rights.
6. Promote inclusivity of and connectivity between all communities within Madison County.
7. New development should pay its own way.
8. Respect our agricultural and rural community character.

## MADISON COUNTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals	Objectives
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MC1. Promote infill residential development within incorporated towns.</li> <li>▪ MC2. Provide opportunities for diverse and affordable housing</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MC3. Preserve existing open space and protect valuable agricultural land.</li> <li>▪ MC4. Plan for responsible, reasonable, and managed growth/development.</li> <li>▪ MC5. Protect the public health and safety of County residents.</li> <li>▪ MC6. Support zoning efforts.</li> <li>▪ MC7. Protect private property rights.</li> <li>▪ MC8. Encourage municipal growth versus “urban sprawl”.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ MC9. Protect wildlife habitat.</li> <li>▪ MC10. Preserve natural resources and protect water resources.</li> <li>▪ MC11. Support growth in agriculture, forestry, recreation and tourism, and small service-based businesses in a manner that does not impact established residential communities.</li> </ul>

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals	Objectives
Environment (Continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MC12. Discourage development that will financially strain public services.</li> <li>MC13. Support infrastructure improvements within incorporated and unincorporated communities.</li> </ul>
Communication, Collaboration, and Citizen Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MC14. Improve collaboration with incorporated towns and unincorporated communities.</li> <li>MC15. Provide education and information on land use legislation and property rights.</li> <li>MC16. Improve physical connectivity across the County.</li> <li>MC17. Collaborate with other local governments and agencies to provide better service to all Madison County residents.</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MC18. Support small service-based business efforts that does not impact existing residential neighbors.</li> <li>MC19. Support infrastructure improvements within incorporated and unincorporated communities.</li> </ul>

## RUBY VALLEY (ALDER, SHERIDAN, TWIN BRIDGES, VIRGINIA CITY) GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals	Objectives
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RV1. Support affordable housing efforts.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RV2. Discourage the conversion of open space to development.</li> <li>RV3. Protect agricultural land.</li> <li>RV4. Support community infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>RV5. Improve non-motorized travel and trail systems throughout the Ruby Valley.</li> <li>RV6. Preserve historic character.</li> <li>RV7. Discourage new development in environmentally sensitive areas.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RV8. Preserve wildlife habitat.</li> <li>RV9. Ensure water availability for new development.</li> <li>RV 10. Protect the health of our wetland, riparian, and river systems.</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RV11. Support small service-based business efforts (retail, restaurant, etc).</li> </ul>
Communication, Collaboration, and Citizen Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RV12. Support existing and new land use management efforts of each community.</li> </ul>

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## NORTH COUNTY (SILVER STAR, JEFFERSON ISLAND, HARRISON, PONY, NORRIS)

Goals	Objectives
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NC1. Support affordable housing efforts.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NC2. Avoid development sprawl in rural, open space areas.</li> <li>NC3. Protect agricultural land.</li> <li>NC4. Preserve historic culture.</li> <li>NC5. Support community infrastructure improvements.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NC6. Preserve natural resources.</li> <li>NC7. Preserve wildlife habitat.</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NC8. Support small business development that does not impact existing residential neighbors.</li> </ul>
Communication, Collaboration, and Citizen Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NC9. Include unincorporated communities in land use and planning decisions.</li> </ul>

## MADISON VALLEY (MCALLISTER, ENNIS, JEFFERS)

Goals	Objectives
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MV1. Support affordable housing efforts.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MV2. Respect private property rights.</li> <li>MV3. Preserve existing open space.</li> <li>MV4. Avoid development sprawl and focus growth near municipalities.</li> <li>MV5. Support zoning efforts.</li> <li>MV6. Promote responsible construction of structures.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MV7. Protect water resources.</li> <li>MV8. Support weed control efforts.</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MV9. Support business development that may provide local employment opportunities.</li> <li>MV10. Support infrastructure improvements within incorporated and unincorporated communities.</li> </ul>
Communication, Collaboration, and Citizen Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MV11. Bolster inter-departmental and multi-jurisdictional budgeting and collaboration.</li> <li>MV12. Provide grant writing support to communities.</li> <li>MV13. Improve physical connectivity across the County.</li> </ul>

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

## BIG SKY

Goals	Objectives
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS1. Support affordable housing efforts.</li> </ul>
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS2. Plan for responsible, reasonable, and managed growth/development.</li> <li>BS3. Promote responsible construction of structures.</li> <li>BS4. Preserve open space.</li> <li>BS5. Improve connectivity within and to Big Sky.</li> <li>BS6. Support infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>BS7. Support zoning efforts.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS8. Preservation of wildlife.</li> <li>BS9. Protect water resources.</li> </ul>
Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS10. Development should pay its own way.</li> </ul>
Communication, Collaboration, and Citizen Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS11. Improve collaboration with Big Sky residents and Gallatin County officials.</li> <li>BS12. Collaborate with other local governments and agencies to provide better service to all Madison County residents.</li> </ul>

## SOUTH MADISON (CAMERON, RAYNOLD'S PASS)

Goals	Objectives
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SM1. Support zoning efforts.</li> <li>SM2. Preserve existing open space.</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SM3. Preservation of wildlife.</li> <li>SM4. Preserving natural resources.</li> </ul>

# POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMY

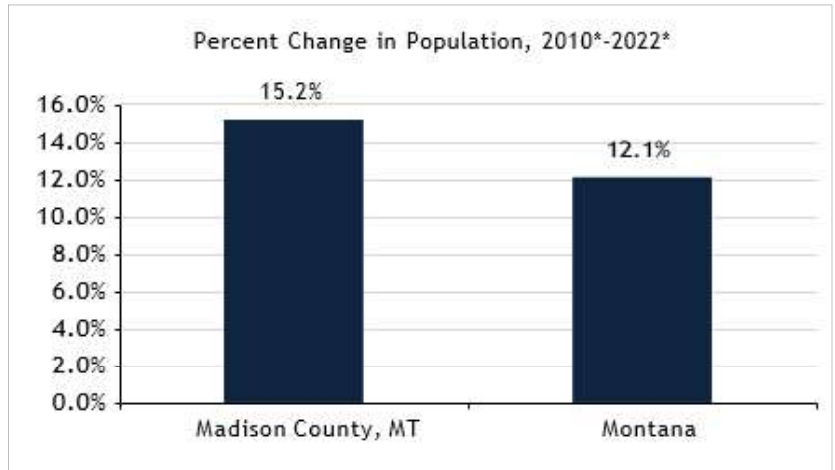
Population growth in a community is typically considered an indication of a healthy economy. In 2022, Madison County’s population was reported at 8,742 which was a 15.2% population increase from the 2010 figure of 7,588.

In 2022, the racial category with the highest estimated percentage of the population in Madison County, according to US Census Bureau, was white at 94.1% and the racial category with the lowest estimated percent of the population was Black or African American at 0.0%. Additionally, 4.2% of the County’s population was reported as two or more races and .08% was reported as Asian, compared to 5.2% and .08% statewide in Montana, respectively.

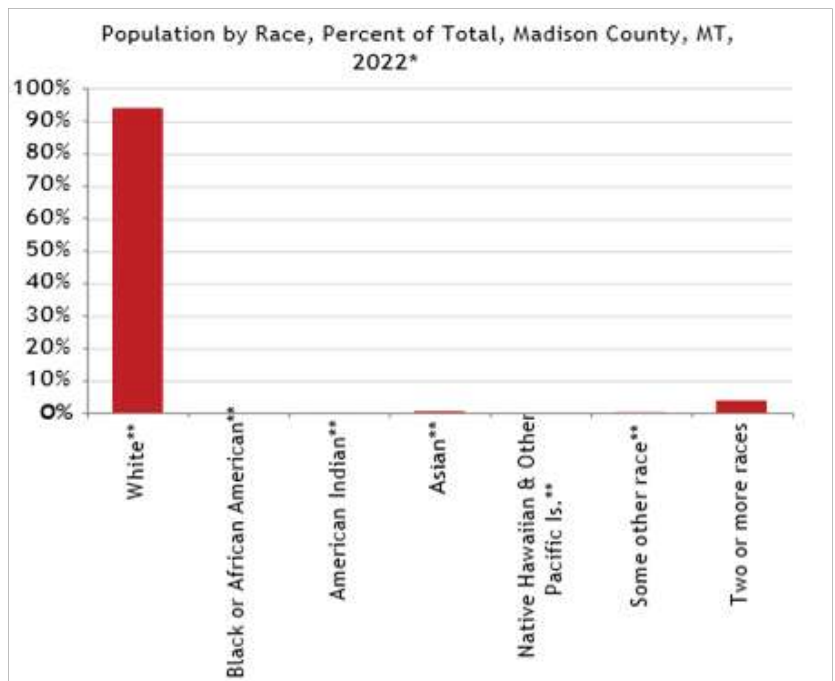
Demographically, Madison County finds itself in a situation familiar to many other western Montana counties, as the median age of its residents has increased. Economic Profile System (EPS) data from the Census Bureau showed that in 2010, the median age for Madison County was an estimated 48.7 years of age. By 2022 it had increased to 54.3 years of age, an increase of approximately 11.5%.

This increase in the median age is partly driven by the increase in the number of residents aged 65 and over. In 2010 the Census estimated this number at 1531 persons in the County and by 2022 it was estimated to be 2640 persons, or approximately 30.2% of the County’s total population. This age group also saw the greatest increase in population overall, with a 10% increase. This age group generally represents retired and aging individuals; therefore, the County should consider issues facing aging residents such as affordable housing, healthcare, and transportation/accessibility.

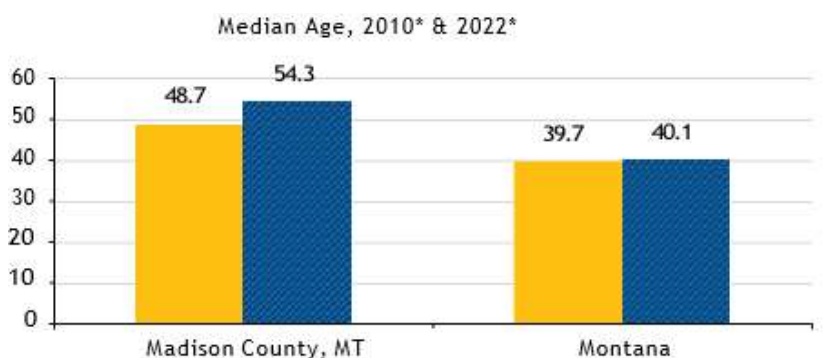
There are several factors that may be leading to an aging population in the County. Some of these include:



▲ Figure 1. Percent Change in Population, 2010-2022  
Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022, Washington D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System



▲ Figure 2. Madison County Population by Race, 2022  
Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022, Washington D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System



▲ Figure 3. Median Resident Age, 2010-2022  
Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022, Washington D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System

# POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMY

- People of retirement age find Madison County an attractive place to retire due to the quality of life and rural, quieter lifestyle; and
- Younger people are finding it economically difficult to stay.

## INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

The median per capita income for Madison County was \$40,358 in 2022 and median household income was \$61,226. Between 2018-2022, the most common income category was \$35,000-\$49,000; with 22.6% of households earning this income. The least common income category was \$10,000 to \$14,999; with only 3.1% of households earning this income.

Education is an important indicator for the economic success of a community. The unfortunate reality is that studies show that communities with a highly educated population see a faster growing workforce, higher incomes, and decreased suffering during economic downturns. Higher education rates have also been linked to lower unemployment and higher wages.

	Madison County, MT	Montana
<b>Total Population 25 yrs or older, 2022*</b>	<b>6,951</b>	<b>758,200</b>
No high school degree	251	41,881
High school graduate	6,700	716,319
Associates degree	904	72,238
Bachelor's degree or higher	2,199	257,627
Graduate or professional	652	87,078
<b>Percent of Total</b>		
No high school degree	3.6%	5.5%
High school graduate	96.4%	94.5%
Associates degree	13.0%	9.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	31.6%	34.0%
Graduate or professional	9.4%	11.5%

▲ Figure 4. Education Level, 2022. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022, Washington D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System

School enrollment can also be an indicator of a community's potential for growth, economically and demographically. Knowing the percent of population enrolled in school helps to identify services and facilities needed, and can support funding opportunities for community investment.

	Madison County, MT	Montana
<b>Total Population over 3 years old, 2022*</b>	<b>8,554</b>	<b>1,058,236</b>
Enrolled in school:	1,416	241,030
Enrolled in nursery school, preschool	61	13,534
Enrolled in kindergarten	142	13,364
Enrolled in grade 1 to grade 4	312	49,934
Enrolled in grade 5 to grade 8	222	52,836
Enrolled in grade 9 to grade 12	443	50,682
Enrolled in college	236	60,680
Not enrolled in school	7,138	817,206
<b>Percent of Total</b>		
Enrolled in school:	16.6%	22.8%
Enrolled in nursery school, preschool	0.7%	1.3%
Enrolled in kindergarten	1.7%	1.3%
Enrolled in grade 1 to grade 4	3.6%	4.7%
Enrolled in grade 5 to grade 8	2.6%	5.0%
Enrolled in grade 9 to grade 12	5.2%	4.8%
Enrolled in college	2.8%	5.7%
Not enrolled in school	83.4%	77.2%

▲ Figure 5. School Enrollment, 2022. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2022, Washington D.C., as reported in Headwaters Economics Economic Profile System

# POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMY

Poverty, although not an optimistic discussion topic for any community, is an important indicator of economic well-being. Poverty is an important community indicator because residents with limited income have different needs and values. For the purposes of this document, “poverty” has been established by the US Census Bureau and the poverty rate by age and family type is calculated by dividing the number of people by demographic in poverty by the total population of that demographic.

In 2022, Madison County’s poverty prevalence was reported at 6.8% for individuals and 5.0% for families, which is below national figures. These percentages translate to approximately 592 individuals and 109 families living below the poverty line in Madison County. Of individuals reporting poverty, the majority are age 18 and under. And of families reporting poverty, the majority are single mothers with children under the age of 18.

Madison County’s unemployment rate was reported at 3.0% in 2023, below the national average of 3.6% and down 4% from 2010 numbers. Unemployment rates rise in the winter months, common in an agricultural community.

In 2022 the top three employment sectors in Madison County were services related (5,502 jobs), accommodation and food services (2,551 jobs), and non-services related (1,893 jobs). From 2001 to 2022 the top three industry sectors that added new jobs were services related (2,080 new jobs), accommodation and food services (1,558 new jobs), and real estate and rental and leasing (188 new jobs).

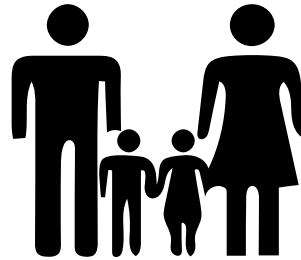
## INDIVIDUALS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL



**6.8%** *Madison County*

**12.4%** *Montana*

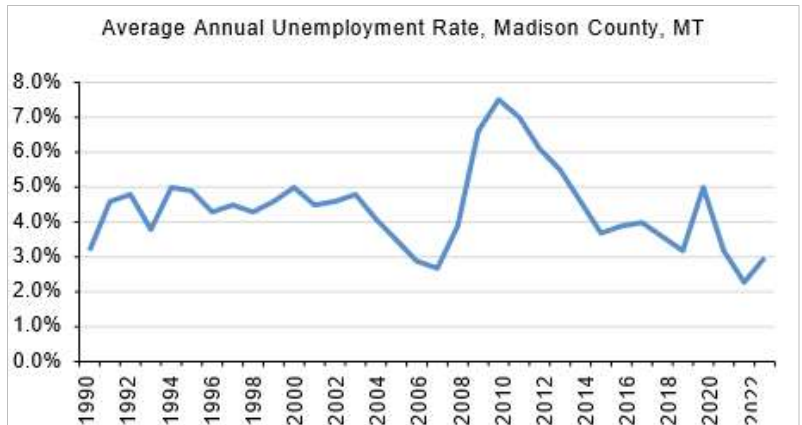
## FAMILIES BELOW POVERTY LEVEL



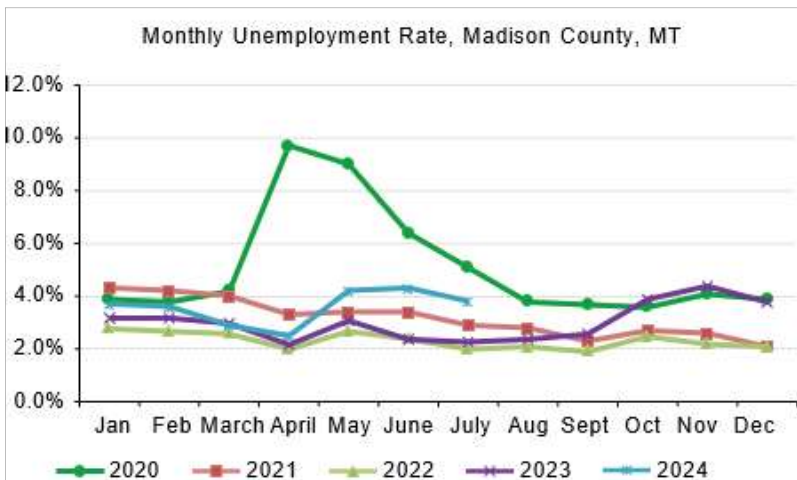
**5%** *Madison County*

**7.3%** *Montana*

▲ Figure 6. Poverty Prevalence, 2022

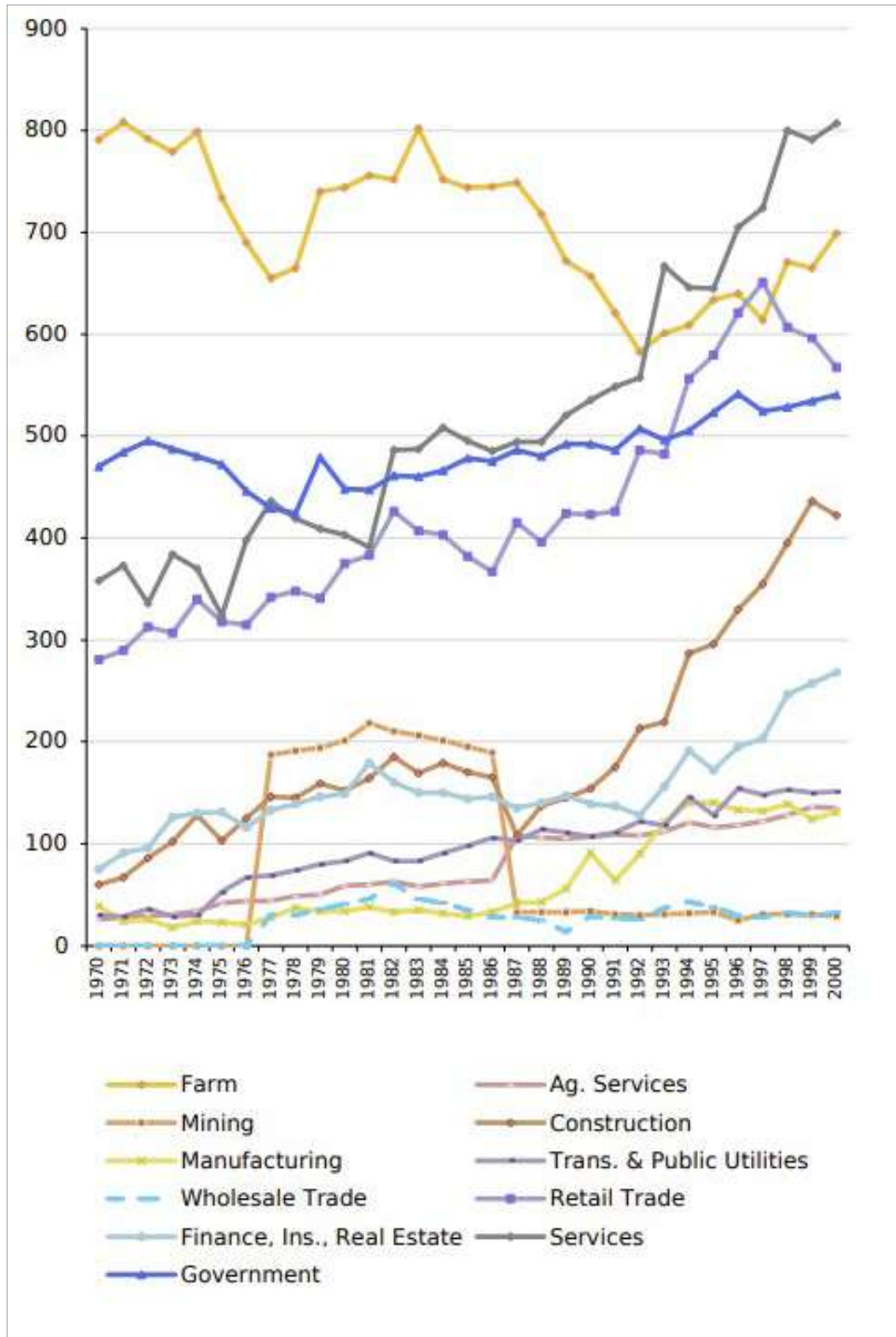


▲ Figure 7. Average Annual Unemployment Rate  
U.S. Department of Labor. 2024. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics’ Economic Profile System



◀ Figure 8. Monthly Unemployment Rate  
U.S. Department of Labor. 2024. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics’ Economic Profile System

# POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMY



▲ Figure 9. Employment by Industry in Madison County 1970-2000  
 U.S. Department of Commerce. 2023. Bureau of Economic Analysis, Regional Economic Accounts, Washington, D.C., reported by Headwaters Economics' Economic Profile System

# POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND ECONOMY

## FINANCIAL OUTLOOK

In fiscal year 2023, Madison County's assets exceeded its liabilities and the total net position equaled \$66,184,467, with \$43,499,805 invested in capital assets net of related debt. As of June 30, 2023, Madison County governmental funds reported a fund balance of \$28,140,713, which was an increase of \$4,588,619 from fiscal year 2022. The County governmental restricted balance for special projects is \$13,800,542 and the unrestricted recorded amount is \$6,944,152. Madison County reported \$13,780,799 in total noncurrent liabilities in 2023, which includes lease liabilities, bond payments for Rural Improvement Districts and Special Improvement Districts, and compensated absence liability, other post-employment benefits (OPEB) liability, net pension liability, and Tobacco Root Mountains Care Center construction debt. The County's governmental net position for fiscal year 2023 was \$62,561,221 and business-type net position was \$3,623,246, both increases from fiscal year 2022.

## PROJECTED TRENDS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING POPULATION CHANGES AND THE ECONOMY

Like many other Montana communities, a steady increase in population, most of which are retired, is something the County needs to continue to watch closely. This trend could affect the ability to provide facilitate or services such as healthcare, housing, senior services, and a stable economy, as all of these require a workforce population. Madison County's general population is likely to continue a gradual increase over the next five years, also, as Montana's population increases. Consistently evaluating the needs of a growing residential population by engaging demographic data and updating long-range plans will be an important factor in determining the County's economic success. Looking to our neighboring counties for projected population trends and both successful and failed efforts to develop a healthy economy in response to those trends will be critical, in addition to working collaboratively with Madison County incorporated and unincorporated communities.



# HOUSING

In recent years, Madison County, like much of Montana, has been confronted with specific affordable housing challenges tied to significant growth throughout the county. Particularly, a rapid increase in housing costs relative to only modest increases in household incomes and a resulting shortage of affordable housing for low to moderate income families.

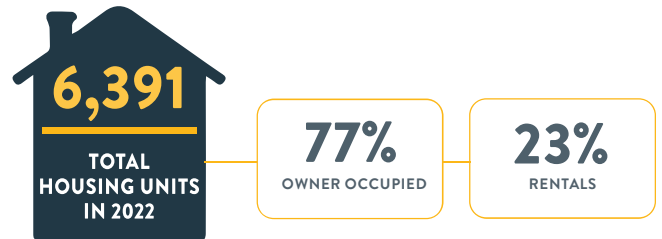
In response to these challenges, a housing needs assessment was recently prepared for the Madison County Housing Advisory Board (HAB). The HAB is a 9-member board of local residents appointed by the county commissioners to examine the county’s housing needs and recommend strategies to address the “crisis”. The 2023 Madison County Housing Needs Assessment Report concluded, “as prices have risen wages have not kept pace, making affording a house a difficult task for residents. Simply put, housing is outside of the normal budget for residents”.

Madison County includes four incorporated communities, including Ennis, Sheridan, Twin Bridges, and Virginia City that are home to 25% of the total population of the county. Ranging in size from 200-1000 residents, these towns are defined by single-family homes on smaller, typically ¼ acre, lots served by centralized water and sewer systems. The bulk of the county’s population, over 75%, live in rural areas, primarily single-family homes in larger lot subdivisions or ranch-type homesteads served by private well and septic systems.

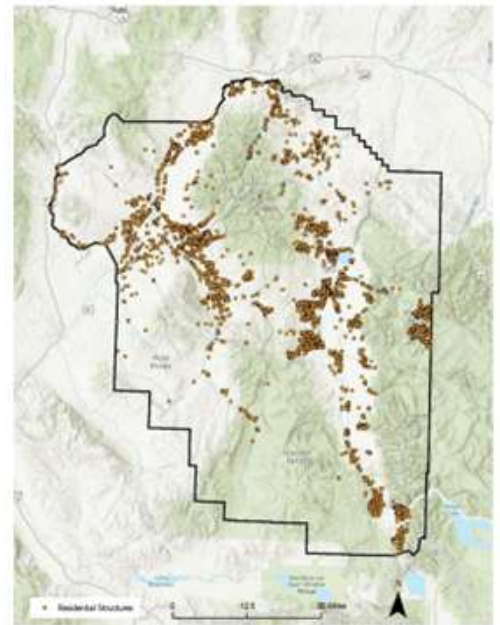
The 2023 Needs Assessment utilized data from several sources including the 2022 US Census American Community Survey (ACS), 2022 Multiple Listing Services (MLS) for real estate in Madison County, and surveys and interviews with residents from the following communities: Alder, Cameron, Ennis, Harrison, Jefferson Island, Laurin, McAllister, Norris, Pony, Sheridan, Silver Star, Twin Bridges, and Virginia City/Nevada City.

Major findings for Madison County include:

- 6391 housing units in Madison County, 77% owner-occupied, 23% rentals
- Number of housing units has not kept pace with the growth in population
- \$428,167 median home price, increase of 122% from 2017



Owner Occupied Housing Unit 2021	Count	Percentage
Single Family Residence	4,793	84%
Townhouse	69	1%
Condominium	415	7%
Mobile Home	435	8%
Rental Unit Type 2021	Count	Percentage
Single Family	15	4%
Duplex	76	21%
Triplex	36	10%
4-plex	28	8%
Mixed Residential and Commercial	11	3%
Apartments (3 Stories & less)	40	11%
Townhouse/Rowhouse	5	1%
Boarding/Rooming House	4	1%
Mobile Home/Manufactured Home Park	145	41%



▲ Figure 10. Location of Residences in Madison County

▲ Figure 11. Housing Unit Types in Madison County

# HOUSING

- \$55,892 Area Median Income (AMI) for Madison County
- \$133,666 Housing Attainability Index, 69% below the median home price (based on AMI, 30% housing cost rule, and conventional financing)
- Owner-occupied housing, 84% single family residences
- Renter-occupied housing, 41% manufactured homes, 21% duplexes, 37% combination of other housing types
- 2.35 people per household, indicating a slight increase in the number of small families moving into the area.
- Madison County has a higher cost of living index (primarily due to housing, transportation, and taxes) compared to adjacent counties.
- Rental costs are difficult to calculate, varying from \$850 to \$2000 per month depending on the size and location of rental unit. Rental availability, not cost, is a more significant concern.

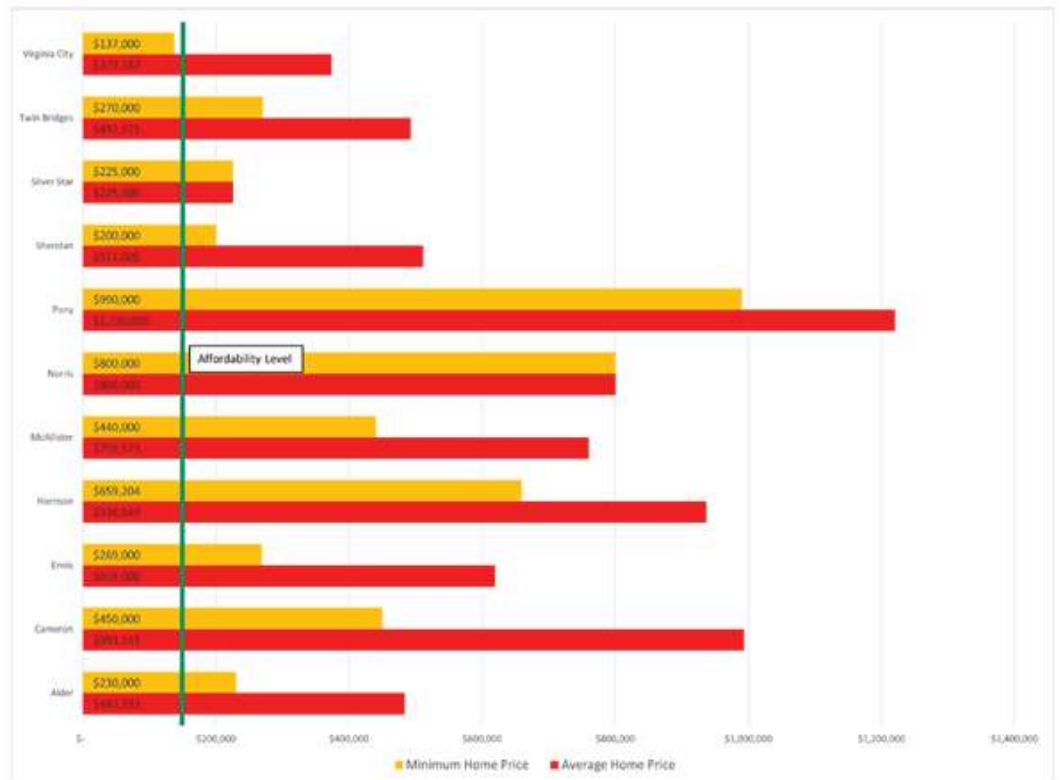
In the intervening year, the disparity between home purchase prices and income levels in Madison County has gotten worse. In September 2024, the National Association of Realtors reported that Montana was ranked the worst among all states for housing affordability. Despite evidence of significant construction activity throughout the county the supply of affordable housing units, either to purchase or rent, is still limited.

2023 Census data indicates approximately 22% of County residents rent, typically duplexes or mobile/manufactured homes. Assuming an average cost to rent of \$1,700 per month for a two-bedroom duplex and a current AMI of \$61,226 this puts home rents, let alone the option to purchase, outside of the price range of most residents.

Attainable/affordable housing is defined “as less than 30% of a resident’s gross monthly income is spent on housing”. 27% of households in the county are identified as “cost burdened”, with more than 30% of their gross monthly income spent on housing.

Primary factors limiting the ability to develop more affordable housing in Madison County include:

- **Land Availability** – Affordable housing projects typically rely on the availability of affordable land, often smaller parcels within established communities and near major employers. Smaller sized lots in local communities are generally in limited supply. Madison County also contains a significant amount of publicly owned land (1,204,642 acres) and conservation easements (296,331 acres), primarily in the Madison River



▲ Figure 12. Minimum and Average Home Prices Compared to Affordability, 2022

valley, that limit housing development opportunities. Over 65% of the total land area in the county is restricted in this manner.

- **Water and sewer infrastructure access** - Affordable housing projects typically rely on access to public water and sewer systems, compared to private wells and septic systems. Only four communities including Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City, and Ennis operate public water and sewer systems. Alder and Harrison, primarily due to high water table concerns, also operate public sewer systems. Many communities have limited capacity in their current water or sewer systems to accommodate growth.
- **Staff Availability** - Affordable housing projects typically rely on assistance from local governments to coordinate access to public funding and manage projects. Local government agencies, both at the county and municipal level, currently have limited staff availability to assist in the development of affordable housing projects.
- **Building Contractor Availability** - Affordable housing projects typically rely on the availability of local building contractors willing to comply with often complex labor and budgeting requirements associated with public funding, i.e. grants. Many local contractors are already busy with other projects or unwilling to take on this additional burden.

## PROJECTED TRENDS AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING HOUSING CONCERNS

There is an expressed need for additional housing options in Madison County. Both logically and statistically, this need will only continue throughout the next five years. In response to housing needs, numerous opportunities are materializing, including:

- **Land Banking** – Land costs are a significant element of housing affordability. The housing needs assessment encouraged the county and local communities to identify existing parcels of land well-suited for affordable housing land banking. Ideally, these parcels would have access to existing utilities, including water, sewer, and power; roads; community services; and major employers to minimize construction and commuting costs. To minimize acquisition costs, the focus should be on identifying publicly owned parcels, including state, county, and local government property. Land owned by local employers, non-profit organizations, including land trusts, and philanthropic private landowners are also a good source of land for affordable housing projects.

Land trusts are typically non-profit organizations created to acquire and hold land to allow for long term affordable housing development. Several successful models exist throughout the state, including cases where the Trust enters into long term leases with prospective homeowners to obtain convention financing to construct homes on the Trust-owned lots, or the Trust could partner with public or private organizations to develop the property for single or multi-family housing units, much like a condominium association. Madison County, as a housing authority, could own and operate the Trust, or they could function as a partner with separate organizations.

- **Partnerships** – Numerous models exist of creative public-private partnerships to address the affordable housing crisis. These projects typically develop multi-family housing units, including duplexes, triplexes, and apartment complexes by leveraging both public and private funding, including Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to attract private investors, and various state and federal grants.

Successful partnerships rely on each partner bringing “something to the table” with the overall goal of reducing the cost to build and operate affordable housing facilities. Examples of these contributions include land, infrastructure, grant funds, regulatory incentives, tax credit financing, low interest construction loans, and construction and property management experience.

- **Infrastructure** - Next to land, convenient access to existing water, sewer, power, and road infrastructure is often the most crucial cost element of an affordable housing project. The housing needs assessment included a detailed analysis of each community’s water and sewer capacity. The most common concern expressed by these communities was the limited capacity of their systems. The report encouraged on-going planning efforts, through Preliminary Engineering



Reports (PERs), to prioritize improvements to these systems to accommodate growth and the need for affordable housing. County government and local communities should work closely together to identify grant funds to help offset the high costs of constructing these improvements.

- **Staffing** – Typical of many rural Montana counties, local communities in Madison County have limited funding for staff to work with volunteer, or modestly compensated, mayors and town council members to plan and manage affordable housing projects. In such cases, county staff is often made available to assist local communities to plan, fund, and manage these types of projects.
- **State and Federal Funding** – In response to the major impact of the housing crisis on small communities and rural counties, significant state and federal funding is being allocated to incentivize the development of affordable housing in Montana and across the country. To ensure access to and efficient use of these funds, it is important that the county and communities work together to proactively identify “shovel ready” affordable housing projects throughout the county.
- **Modular Homes** – Recognizing there is a limited supply of local building contractors and that many of these builders are busy constructing homes for wealthier residents, it is imperative that their time be used effectively and that other construction technologies are utilized wherever possible. Fortunately, significant advances have been made in the design and construction of modular homes, often referred to as mobile or manufactured homes. Today’s modular homes come in variety of efficient and attractive designs and can be constructed, delivered, and finished by local contractors in significantly less time and more affordably than conventional stick-built homes. With careful consideration given to design and siting, it appears modular home technology offers a timely and cost-effective way to introduce high-quality affordable homes within existing communities and neighborhoods.

Future Actions that would serve Madison County well, in regards to addressing housing needs include:

- **Housing Support Staffing** – Per a recommendation from the housing needs assessment, in July 2024 the county hired its first full-time housing coordinator. The 12-month contracted position is a joint venture between Madison County and the Northern Rocky Mountain Economic Development District based out of Bozeman. The Housing Coordinator works with the Madison County Housing Advisory Board (HAB) to develop strategies to address affordable housing needs throughout the county.

# HOUSING

- **Land Inventory** – At the request of the HAB, the Housing Coordinator is compiling an inventory of parcels of land that appear well-suited to development of affordable housing. The inventory has focused on smaller parcels, typically publicly owned, in close proximity to existing incorporated communities, infrastructure, and major employers. To date, parcels have been researched and identified in each community and conversations initiated with the respective communities. The goal is to select sites for potential affordable housing pilot projects in cooperation with the communities, the county, and major employers. The inventory is scheduled for completion in early 2025.
- **Madison County Housing Action Plan** – In cooperation with the HAB, the Housing Coordinator is drafting a Housing Action Plan to complement the 2023 Housing Needs Assessment. The Plan, modeled after a similar plan from Park County, will present specific affordable housing tools, policies, and projects as recommendations to the County Commissioners for consideration. The Plan is scheduled for completion in early 2025.
- **Affordable Housing Pilot Projects** – These cooperative community-based affordable housing pilot projects could involve major employers (hospitals, schools, and others), existing infrastructure (water, sewer, and roads), land banking, local builders, and modular homes. The goal is to work with city, county, and state agencies to identify funding to construct a small-scale affordable housing project in each of the incorporate communities of Madison County by 2026.
- **Madison County Partnership** – Create a county-led housing authority to coordinate efforts with existing affordable housing agencies currently working in Madison County, including Action Inc. (Butte HRDC), Headwater RC&D, NRMEDD (HRDC Bozeman), Gallatin Valley Habitat for Humanities, local builders, and financial institutions.

The County’s population has increased significantly over the past few years, averaging 2.6% annually. Assuming a more conservative annual growth rate of 0.52% going forward, the county will add over 2000 new residents by the year 2060. In response, over 850 new housing units will need to be constructed over the next 37 years. Case studies from other Montana communities suggest creative public-private partnerships may offer a possible solution.



# LAND USE



## EXISTING LAND USE

Land use and ownership in Madison County, outside of incorporated town limits, is a fairly even distribution of private and public land. Agriculture is a dominant land use among private land ownership and conservation easements are in place throughout both the Ruby and Madison valleys. Unincorporated Madison County is not zoned; therefore, designations for types of land use and development are not determined or quantified. Similar to other rural counties in Montana, residential development has steadily increased since 2000, with a surge of new development since 2020.

## LAND USE ADMINISTRATION

Madison County employs a Sanitarian, Planner, and Floodplain Administrator who review, evaluate, and ensure that all proposed land development adheres to adopted regulations, environmental standards, and land use statute. The County administers all land use within the jurisdictional boundaries of Madison County and works closely with officials from Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City and Ennis, via interlocal agreements, to evaluate land development adjacent to town limits.

Madison County has an appointed County Planning Board, in accordance with Montana Code Annotated 76-1-211, that reviews land use and other issues and makes recommendations to the Madison County Board of Commissioners, as requested or required. The Planning Board also reviews, revises, and updates long-range planning documents.

## SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS

The County has Subdivision Regulations in place and the incorporated towns utilize the County regulations or have adopted independent regulations. Madison County's Subdivision Regulations are discussed in further detail later in this document.

## ZONING REGULATIONS

Madison County has not adopted and does not currently enforce Zoning Regulations. The incorporated towns of Twin Bridges, Virginia City and Ennis have adopted and enforce zoning within their jurisdictional boundaries; Sheridan has initiated the process of developing and adopting zoning regulations.

# LAND USE

## **BUILDINGS FOR LEASE OR RENT REGULATIONS (BLR)**

Because the County has not adopted and does not enforce a zoning code that governs land use, it has adopted regulations for the leasing or renting of buildings when more than three units are involved. The process for BLR review includes adjacent landowner notification, a public hearing with the Board of Commissioners, and Commission review and decision.

## **ANNEXATION**

While some new development will occur via the construction of homes and businesses on existing vacant land, the annexation of new land from the County to the incorporated towns of Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City and Ennis may become a desirable option. It will be important for new annexations to be reviewed to ensure that they become an asset to both County and Town residents and to determine what their effect will be on the ability to provide services including fire protection, water, sewer, stormwater drainage, and street maintenance. Twin Bridges adopted a growth policy in 2023, Sheridan updated a growth policy in 2023, Virginia City adopted a growth policy in 2023, and Ennis has initiated the development of a Growth Policy (2024). Each of these Town growth policies include a Future Land Use Plan map, identifying adjacent County lands that may be suitable for annexation and development that would benefit the town. The County and City should continue to work together on all new developments and annexation and the development of an Annexation Plan for each incorporated community would be most beneficial for proactive land use development.

## **CONSERVATION EASEMENTS**

Conservation easements are widely used as a tool for voluntary land conservation and the preservation of natural resources. These legal agreements, typically between a private landowner and a government agency or conservation group, permanently limit the use of the land to protect its conservation and natural resource values by allowing the landowner to maintain control but under a restrictive nature. This often translates to land remaining in open space, recreation, or agricultural uses, as opposed to development. Approximately 130,000 acres of land in Madison County are committed in conservation easements. This is important to understand because those conservation easements limit land use development in these areas.

## **PROJECTED TRENDS, LAND USE CONSTRAINTS, AND STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING LAND USE CHALLENGES**

As the population continues to increase and Montana generally becomes more populated, Madison County can expect to continue the steady increase in both population and development in the next five years. Many land use constraints are present in Madison County, including complex topography, adverse soil conditions, groundwater presence, floodplains, watercourses, wildfire risk, year-round accessibility, and proximity or access to services. Like much of Montana, agricultural lands are transitioning to development and irrigation utilities are becoming a prevalent issue. This directly links to water quality, quantity, and availability, all of which will play a large role in determining development sustainability. Implementing the Growth Policy's Action Plan should be the groundwork for addressing any land use-related issues that are identified within the next five years.



# LOCAL SERVICES

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Madison County elects three Commissioners, one for each of the three geographical districts, to represent the best interests of residents. The Commissioners and other County employees provide services out of the Madison County Administration Building and other County buildings, most of which are located in the County seat of Virginia City.

The incorporated towns of Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City and Ennis each elect a Mayor and Town Council to represent the residents of each respective town. Town officials offer services out of local Town Hall facilities.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

The Madison County Sheriff's Department provides police protection, emergency response, and correctional and court security throughout unincorporated Madison County and within incorporated towns, via interlocal and mutual aid agreements. The department is staffed by the Sheriff, an Undersheriff, 17 POST-certified Deputies (including the Sheriff), two administrative staff members, one detention and court security deputy (filled by one of the POST-certified Deputies), nine full-time Communications Officers, and two part-time Communications Officers.

## FIRE PROTECTION

Fire protection within Madison County is provided by multiple fire departments:

- Madison Valley (volunteer)
- Harrison (volunteer)
- Sheridan (volunteer)
- Twin Bridges (volunteer)
- Virginia City (volunteer)
- Alder (volunteer)
- Jefferson Valley (volunteer)
- Big Sky
- Yellowstone Mountain Club Rural Fire

Each department maintains a fleet of fire trucks and command vehicles including structure pumpers, water tenders, and wildland response engines. The departments total approximately 60 volunteers and staff and provide structure fire response, rescue operations, wildland response, Hazmat response, and medical response.



Photo Credit: Madison Valley Rural Fire Department Facebook

# LOCAL SERVICES

Madison County is engaged in mutual aid agreements for fire protection with Montana DNRC, United States Forest Service, the State of Idaho, and Beaverhead, Jefferson and Gallatin counties. Fire response and protection in Madison County is advised by the Madison County Office of Emergency Management and Fire Warden.

## MEDICAL

Healthcare services in the Ruby Valley are provided by Ruby Valley Medical Center (RVMC) in Sheridan, a medical clinic, emergency room, and rural hospital with LifeFlight accessibility. RVMC also provides medical services at an additional rural health clinic in Twin Bridges. Madison Valley is served by Madison Valley Medical Center (MVMC) in Ennis, also a medical clinic, emergency room, and robust rural hospital with LifeFlight accessibility. Both RVMC and MVMC are operated by a Foundation and Board of Trustees.

Due to the geographically expansive nature of Madison County, other entities play a critical role in health and medical services for our residents. Ruby Valley EMS, Madison Valley EMS, Ruby Valley Search and Rescue, Madison Valley Search and Rescue, and rural fire departments all play key roles in medical response in Madison County.

## SENIOR SERVICES

Madison County owns and operates two assisted living and nursing home care facilities, Tobacco Root Mountains Care Center and Madison Valley Manor. Additionally, the County also financially contributes to the operation of the Twin Bridges Senior and Community Center, the Sheridan Senior Center, the Ennis Senior Center and the Hollowtop Senior Center (Pony). The Senior Citizen Board serves as an advisory Board to the Commission on senior service interests in Madison County. And the County operates a Senior Citizen Shuttle, providing transit to medical appointments and other destinations within and outside of Madison County.

## CEMETERIES

Madison County operates eight cemeteries throughout the County: Cardwell, Laurin, Madison Valley, Pioneer, Sheridan, Taylor, Twin Bridges and Virginia City. The cemeteries are managed by respective boards appointed by the Commissioners.

## LIBRARY

Madison County residents utilize the services of the Twin Bridges Public Library, Sheridan Library, Madison Valley Library, and the



Photo Credit: RVMC.org



Photo Credit: Twin Bridges Public Library Facebook

# LOCAL SERVICES

County-operated Thompson-Hickman County Library in Virginia City. Services include a large collection of books, audio books, DVDs, magazines, newspapers, historical artifacts, and Montana and local history collections. The Thompson-Hickman County Library offers computers, a scanner, a copier, and a fax machine, all available for public use as well as internet access. The library also offers a variety of both adult and children’s programming and activities.

## SCHOOLS

There are 13 public schools in Madison County and the school system is ranked second of 56 counties in public schools per capita. The Madison County Superintendent of Schools is provided by and for the people living in the County; the Superintendent’s office is a service agency that responds to local needs and provides professional and educational leadership.



## PROJECTED TRENDS AND STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING AND DEVELOPING LOCAL SERVICES

If population and demographic patterns continue to follow the patterns of the previous five years, Madison County can expect to experience both an increase in overall population and an increase in an aging population, which will directly impact the use of and need for a variety of services. More residents result in increased use of law enforcement, fire services, medical facilities and services, senior services, and others. Should the County see an increase in young families amongst its population, ultimately schools, libraries, and other services will see an equal amount of increased use. By maintaining an updated Capital Improvements Plan and Growth Policy, along with implementing the Growth Policy’s Action Plan, the County will likely be able to maintain or develop local services in accordance with the demand placed upon them by a growing and changing demographic.

# PUBLIC FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

## WATER

Many residents living in Madison County obtain their water from individual onsite wells. The exceptions to this are residents living in the municipalities of Ennis, Sheridan, Virginia City and Twin Bridges, which have centralized water systems. In addition, the Big Sky Water and Sewer District provides water for some residents in the Big Sky area.

## WASTEWATER

Madison County residents typically have private septic systems for their wastewater needs, except those residents who reside within municipalities or water and sewer districts. The Madison County Sanitarian and Board of Health has adopted regulations and issues permits for all new individual and multi-user wastewater treatment systems. These regulations and permitting process establish and enforce standards to consistently ensure the proper treatment and disposal of wastewater, protecting both public health and the environment.

The municipalities of Ennis, Sheridan, Virginia City and Twin Bridges have centralized wastewater treatment systems and the County's three water and sewer districts provide wastewater treatment services. It also should be noted that each municipality does have some individual septic systems within the Town limits.



## BRIDGES

There are currently 48 bridges located throughout the County's three road districts, all of which are maintained by the County. These bridges are off-system bridges, which are not part of the Federal-aid Highway System. There are also several bridges located in the County that provide access to federal lands and are maintained by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service; these are not part of the 48 County-maintained bridges.

Madison County has been proactive regarding the maintenance, updates, and replacement of bridges, utilizing grant awards to fund much of the needed infrastructure upgrades. Since 2002, the County has replaced or installed 51 bridges. Of these, 24 were replaced with improved bridges, and 27 were replaced with culverts.



# PUBLIC FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

## AIRPORTS

Madison County owns two County airports that are open for public use, Ennis Big-Sky Airport and Twin Bridges Airport. The County Airport Board is a seven-person advisory board that recommends actions regarding the operation and maintenance of each airport to the County Commission.

Ennis Big-Sky Airport is located approximately six miles southeast of the town of Ennis. It has two runways, hangars, tie-downs and fuel for sale at the facility. The Twin Bridges Airport consists of two runways and provides hangars, tie-downs, and fuel sales. Madison County does enforce Airport Affected Area Regulations for construction and development within an identified adjacent airport affected area for both airports.



Photo Credit: NBC Montana

## STORMWATER

The County does not operate or maintain any formal stormwater systems, including inlets, conveyance pipes/ditches, or retention/detention ponds.

## FAIRGROUNDS

The Madison County Fairgrounds are located in Twin Bridges. The fairgrounds facilities host a number of events including rodeos, weddings, festivals, graduations, and the annual Madison County Fair and Rodeo. The location of the fairgrounds, along the Beaverhead River, presents some limitations to facility improvements, as much of the fairgrounds is located within the Regulated Special Flood Hazard Area (floodplain).

Despite the limitations of the floodplain on fairgrounds facilities improvements, the County has persistently pursued updates to accommodate the needs of residents. Recent projects at the fairgrounds include water and sewer main line rerouting to accommodate year-round services, planning for the addition of an events center, and rehabilitation of two historical buildings.



## ROADS

Madison County is responsible for maintaining over 1,200 miles of roads within three separate Road Districts. These roads include a mix of gravel and paved surfacing. There are many roads in the County that are within State and Federal jurisdiction.



## **STRATEGIES FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF COUNTY INFRASTRUCTURE**

The 2016 Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) currently serves as the County’s strategy for maintaining infrastructure per the requirements of the State statute 76-1-601, MCA. Continuing to update and implement the projects outlined in the CIP will ensure the County’s infrastructure is being maintained and replaced. The plan is also important for budgeting and grant application purposes. The County will update the Capital Improvements Plan to reflect the newest emerging needs, completed projects, and to maintain competitiveness when applying for grants.

# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

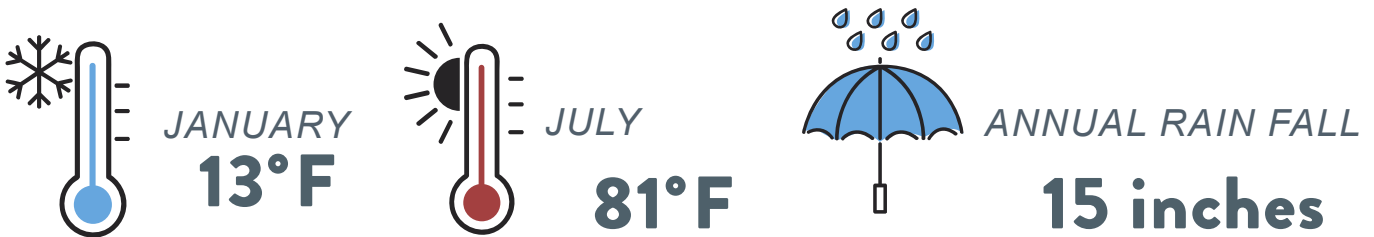
## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Madison County is located in Southwestern Montana, approximately 32 miles west of Bozeman and 26 highway miles east of Butte. According to the United States Census Bureau, Madison County's estimated population in 2022 was 8,742 people. Virginia City serves as the County seat.

Madison County is the thirteenth largest Montana county by land area, spanning approximately 2,300,000 acres. Located in southwestern Montana, Madison County is bordered by Jefferson and Silver Bow Counties to the north, Beaverhead County to the west and south, and Gallatin County to the east. Elevation ranges from 4,200 feet along the Jefferson River, to 11,316 feet at Hilgard Peak in the Madison Range.

## CLIMATE

The County's climate is characterized by generally warm and dry summers and cold, snowy winters. The warmest month of the year is July with an average high temperature of 81 degrees Fahrenheit, while the coldest month is January with an average low temperature of 13 degrees Fahrenheit. The average annual precipitation is 15 inches, with the highest precipitation rates in May and June. The average annual snowfall is 60 inches. December through March generally receives the highest amounts of snowfall at ~12 inches per month.



## FLOODING AND FLOODPLAIN

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), multiple portions of Madison County are recognized as being located within a mapped floodplain or floodway. The County currently participates in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) and has adopted floodplain development regulations. The incorporated towns of Twin Bridges, Sheridan, and Ennis also participate in the NFIP and have adopted floodplain development regulations.

Floodplain development regulations are important in areas of known flood risk, as they protect people and property to reduce flood losses. This is especially important in Madison County, as the combination of multiple rivers and streams and wildfire events increase the risk of flooding. Properties within a mapped floodplain are required to obtain a Floodplain Development Permit for any development, including structure construction, excavation, land reclamation, etc.

## WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN AREAS

Wetlands are distinct ecosystems in areas that are flooded or saturated by water. Similarly, riparian areas are the saturated land between land, rivers and streams, typically recognized as streambanks, floodplains, and wetlands. Unique vegetation and aquatic species thrive in both wetlands and riparian areas. Both have many benefits to people, including water purification, bank stabilization, flood control, and groundwater replenishment.

Wetlands or riparian areas occupy nearly 75,000 acres within Madison County. This directly impacts both development and agriculture, as these areas are not always suitable for either due to the presence of water. But these areas do provide opportunities for conservation efforts.

# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

## FISH AND WILDLIFE

Madison County hosts a healthy fisheries and wildlife habitat that includes a variety of fish species, including but not limited to Arctic grayling, westslope cutthroat trout and Northern redbelly dace, pollinators, many species of grassland and upland game birds, and big game such as mule deer, white-tailed deer, pronghorn, and elk. Hunting and fishing are popular recreation activities amongst residents. A handful of threatened or endangered species of fish and wildlife have been identified in Madison County, including Canada Lynx, Grizzly bear, wolverine, the Yellow-Billed Cuckoo, and two plants, including Ute ladies' tresses and whitebark pine. If development, by means of subdivision, moves into more rural areas, the County could benefit from working with State and Federal agencies to identify habitat and migration corridors, as a means to reduce conflict and maintain healthy wildlife habitat.



*Photo Credit: Rainbow Valley Lodge*

## HAZARD AREAS

Madison County has 34 dams – 8 high hazard, 7 significant hazard, and 19 low hazard. The Clark Canyon Dam in neighboring Beaverhead County and the Hebgen Dam in neighboring Gallatin County could also impact Madison County. Although not particularly likely, seismic activity, poor maintenance, overwhelming flow conditions, and terrorist activities can all lead to the catastrophic failure of a dam. The result is the rush of water contained by the dam downstream at a rapid pace. The structural integrity of a dam depends on its design, maintenance, and ambient conditions. The potential for dam failure and catastrophic downstream impacts cannot be overlooked in an area subject to earthquakes and intense spring snowmelt and runoff events.

Madison County is in one of the most active earthquake areas of the nation. The County lies near the junction of the Intermountain Seismic Belt and Centennial Tectonic Belt and is in close proximity to Yellowstone National Park, a very active geologic area. The epicenter of Montana's most significant earthquake in recorded history, the August 17, 1959 Hebgen Lake Earthquake, was located in southeastern Madison County.

Earthquakes within and centered outside Madison County can have profound impacts. The most significant damage from most earthquakes is to construction. Bridges are particularly vulnerable to collapse. Buildings vary in susceptibility, depending upon construction and the types of soils on which they are built. Fires caused by ruptured gas mains may also destroy structures. Dam failures, avalanches, and landslides may also be resultant hazards. The 500-year earthquake for Madison County is expected to cause over \$36 million in building-related economic losses (Madison County Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan, August 2009).

## SAND AND GRAVEL RESOURCES

Access to sand and gravel is important for the construction and maintenance of streets and roads as well as the construction of new homes and businesses. According to the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Open Cut Mining Program, multiple permitted gravel pits are located within Madison County. Map (X) of this Document Shows all permitted gravel pit locations.

## WILDFIRE AND THE WILDLAND-URBAN INTERFACE

The wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) is the zone of transition between unoccupied land and human development or, in other words, the area where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

# NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Madison County Fire Protection consists of eight fire protection districts, a fire warden, and a USFS ranger district with initial attack resources. A state DNRC response is also part of the profile but come from Dillon, MT, when needed. While individual, the two “Valleys” (Ruby and Madison) both operate synchronously. Generally speaking, when a wildland fire occurs in the Ruby Valley, all agencies in the Ruby from Virginia City to Twin Bridges are typically dispatched. In the Madison Valley, Virginia City, USFS, MVRFD, and Harrison are dispatched. While this allows for a surge of personnel and resources, it can also be somewhat taxing on the organizations and their staff. There have been talks of consolidation or organizations into two rural fire districts on each side of the County, which should continue to be explored to provide more consistency, resources, staffing, and funding as opposed to the limitations that are currently in place.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

Madison County contains 18 properties and districts on the National Register of Historic Places, including 1 National Historic Landmark. Significant sites include:

- Virginia City Historic District
- Robbers Roost
- Pony Historic District
- Madison County Fairgrounds
- Doncaster Round Barn
- Beaverhead Rock



## PROJECTED TRENDS AND STRATEGIES FOR UTILIZING AND PRESERVING NATURAL RESOURCES

Madison County is rich in natural resources, and these are likely to be stressed in correlation with an anticipated increase in population and development within the next five years. Identifying which of these natural resources are priorities for preservation and then implementing an action plan through long-range plans and regulations will be beneficial. Engaging in communications and planning with local conservation and emergency service agencies will ensure natural resource preservation stays at the forefront of development.

# MADISON COUNTY GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITIES

Madison County is, geographically, very large and diverse. Therefore, residents in different areas within the County face different challenges and have different priorities for their land use and lifestyle. What may be a concern or threat for a resident of Big Sky is often different than a concern or threat for a resident of Alder. Madison County is home to six mountain ranges, all contained within the Rocky Mountains: Tobacco Root Mountains, Ruby Range, Snowcrest Range, Gravelly Range, Madison Range, and a portion of the Highland Mountains. Madison County communities are tucked in and between these mountain ranges. In addition to the four incorporated towns within Madison County, including Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City, and Ennis, there are multiple unincorporated communities, or “geographical communities”, within the County.

## RUBY VALLEY: ALDER, SHERIDAN, TWIN BRIDGES AND VIRGINIA CITY

The Ruby Valley is situated between the Ruby Range and Tobacco Root Mountains and follows the Ruby River, Beaverhead River and Jefferson River in the western and northwestern portions of the County. The Ruby Valley informally includes the “Upper Ruby”, Alder, Laurin, Sheridan, Twin Bridges, the “East Bench”, and Virginia City, although Virginia City is situated very independently atop the Tobacco Root Mountains. The Ruby Valley is steeped in history, agriculture, and mining. Although recreation tourism is a driver of the economy, this geographical community is home to some of the most valuable agricultural soils in Madison County. Although a population boost and an increase in development has been observed in the Ruby Valley, the community is reminiscent of a lifestyle from the past, where neighbors take care of each other, children are safe to roam freely, multi-generational families steward the land, residents are passionate about farming and ranching, and the highlights of the year are the community gatherings and events.

Concerns in the Ruby Valley include water quantity and quality, preservation of wildlife habitat and open space, historic preservation, accessibility to public lands, and overdevelopment. Twin Bridges and Virginia City both enforce zoning regulations, amongst other development permitting processes, and Sheridan has initiated the process of adopting zoning regulations. The use of subdivision exemptions, mostly the Family Transfer/Conveyance exemption which creates new tracts of land without review, are grossly overused within the Ruby Valley, contributing to a lack of data or understanding of groundwater supplies and aquifer health. Knowing the status of aquifer health is especially important within agricultural communities, as is the case in the Ruby Valley. Unique to the Ruby Valley is a concerted effort amongst agricultural producers to explore a variety of progressive soil health practices. This proactive effort is representative of the overall commitment of Ruby Valley residents to responsible land stewardship and the preservation of lifestyle.



# MADISON COUNTY GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITIES

## **NORTH COUNTY: SILVER STAR, JEFFERSON ISLAND, HARRISON, PONY AND NORRIS**

The North County geographical community includes Silver Star, Waterloo, a portion of Whitehall and Cardwell, Jefferson Island, Mammoth, Harrison, Pony and Norris. This area is situated at the north end of the County, beginning at the north end of the Ruby Valley, following the northern portion of the Tobacco Root Mountains, and wrapping around to the east, tying into the north end of the Madison Valley. Agriculture is prevalent in these communities. Known for picturesque viewsheds and a quiet landscape, North County appeals to large and small scale ranchers, farmers, and homesteaders, and those seeking a slow, quiet, and simple quality of life in a rural setting. The Harrison and Cardwell areas have seen an increase in development interest, due to proximity to the City of Three Forks, a 20 mile drive east into Gallatin County.

Concerns in North County communities include affordable housing, wildlife preservation, resource preservation, and maintaining community character. These areas are not zoned and other than subdivision regulations, no development restrictions are in place, as is the case in the majority of Madison County. The Harrison wastewater system is in need of upgrades but soil challenges and expense are a major hinderance to successfully completing this project. Cost of living in these communities is high, which does not support attracting teachers or other workforce, which is specifically a problem in Harrison where the school district supports students as far as 40 miles away.



## **MADISON VALLEY: MCALLISTER, ENNIS AND JEFFERS**

The Madison Valley includes McAllister, Ennis, Jeffers and a good portion of Cameron. Situated between the Tobacco Root Mountains and Gravelly Range to the west and the Madison Range to the east, the Madison Valley surrounds and follows the Madison River. Recreation and tourism are the economical drivers of this geographical community, although agriculture is also prevalent. The Town of Ennis is a bustling community that has become more transient in population, likely due to proximity and employment opportunities in Big Sky and Bozeman, located in adjacent Gallatin County. Residents enjoy living in Madison Valley for the rural setting, quality of life, quiet and peaceful setting, and access to recreation opportunities.

Concerns in the Madison Valley include private property rights, access to public lands and fishing, affordability, infrastructure within Ennis, and the impact of short term rentals (STRs) on the community. As echoed throughout the entirety of the County, slowing down



# MADISON COUNTY GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITIES

rural development and focusing instead on infill development within and adjacent to municipalities is a top priority for Madison Valley residents.

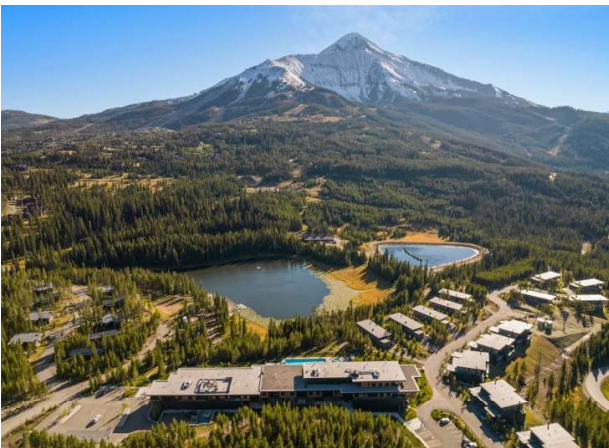
## BIG SKY

The unincorporated community of Big Sky is a unique resort community, located along the eastern border of the County in the Madison Range, straddling the Madison and Gallatin County line. Big Sky is a premier ski resort, world-renowned for luxury accommodations in an unrivaled winter sports setting. The resort sub-communities of Cascade, Moonlight Basin, Big Sky Resort, Yellowstone Club and a portion of Spanish Peaks all reside within Madison County. Big Sky was the vision of Chet Huntley, newscaster of NBC's nightly "Huntley-Brinkley Report". Huntley's vision was to establish a ski village and golf course in the Rocky Mountains of Montana, which ultimately led to the grand opening of Big Sky Resort in 1974. The area has been extensively developed into multiple resorts in years since, which is both impressive and problematic.

Big Sky's population is split between year-round residents, service workforce, and tourists. The majority of homes are not occupied year-round and affordable housing for the workforce has been challenging, as real estate costs are at luxury prices and the short term rental market is thriving.

Big Sky has historically operated independently and similar to a municipality. However, without incorporation, the community falls under County jurisdiction, which has been a source of tension and frustration because many County policies and regulations are more representative of and applicable to rural community development. Big Sky has been disconnected from other Madison County communities, both socially and geographically, as the most direct access from the Madison Valley and the rest of Madison County to Big Sky is via a gated private road that does not allow for public access. However, Big Sky is an important and valuable Madison County community, for economical and social reasons.

Concerns in Big Sky include wildlife habitat preservation, development regulations, trails and connectivity, watercourse preservation, and, most adamantly, inclusion and acknowledgement. Infrastructure needing improvement, allocation of taxes for services is needing evaluation, and lack of development regulations are all concerns that are echoed throughout Big Sky, and have been reflected in community survey results and community outreach efforts.



*Photo Credit: Ascend Properties*



*Photo Credit: Dale Cox Architects*

## SOUTH MADISON: CAMERON AND RAYNOLD'S PASS

The South Madison geographical community mainly includes the southern portion of Cameron, specifically the Raynold's Pass portion. Located in the southeast corner of Madison County, the South Madison is a remote valley situated where the Gravelly Range and Madison Range meet. The South Madison has a heritage of agriculture and is home to many

# MADISON COUNTY GEOGRAPHICAL COMMUNITIES

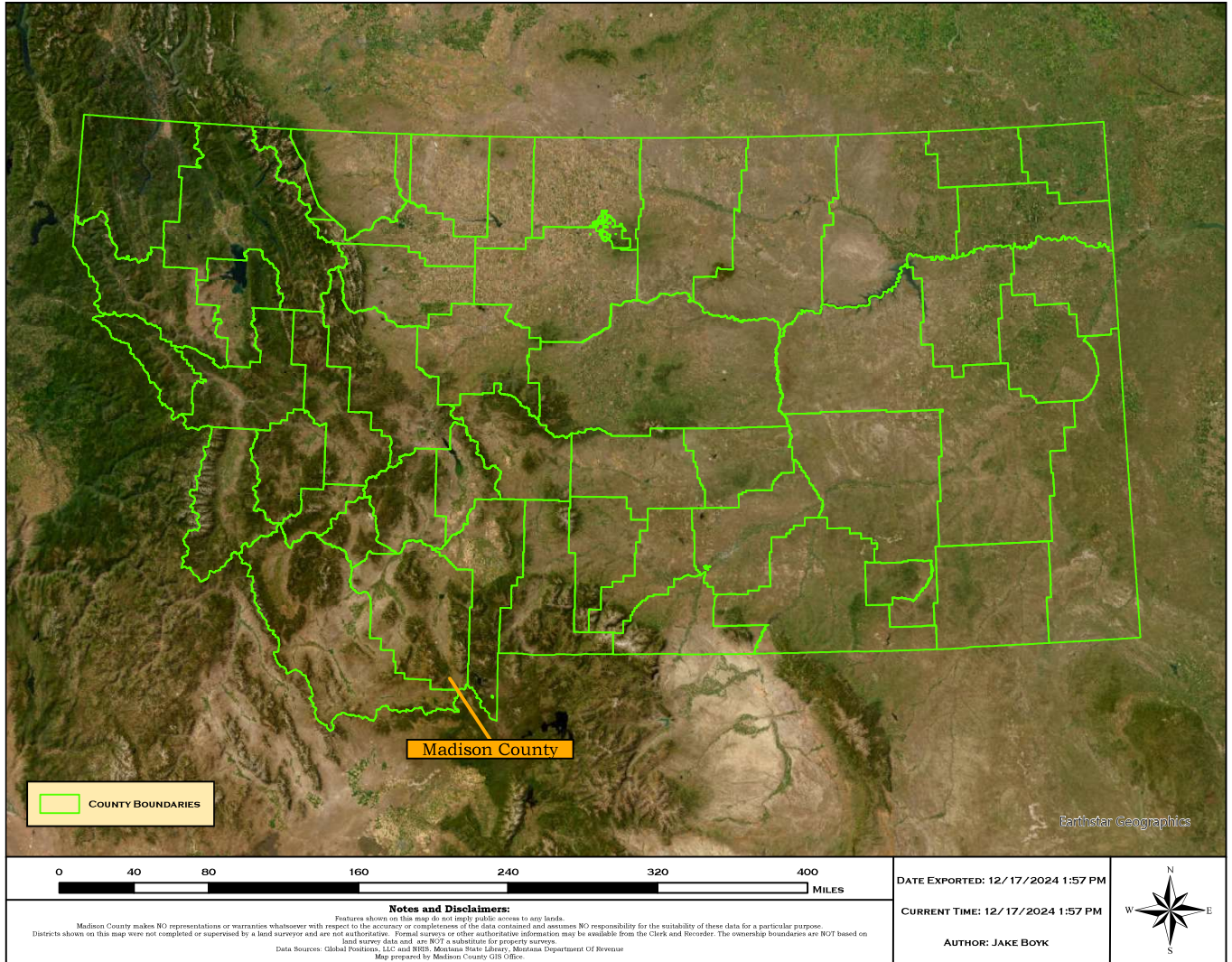
of southwest Montana’s prime wildlife habitat and wildlife migration pathways. The community is far removed from services and hosts a small population of mostly retired year-round residents, as the majority of residents are non-winter occupants. A large portion of the land is held in conservation easements and the remainder is a mix of low-density subdivision and 20+ acres tracts that were platted prior to subdivision review requirements. Many tracts sat undeveloped for years but 2020 drove interest in owning a piece of Montana and many of these undeveloped tracts in the South Madison were purchased and development followed. Additionally, subdivision exemptions account for the creation of many tracts within this area. Residents of the South Madison enjoy a quiet and rural lifestyle with plentiful open space and access to outdoor recreation.

Concerns in the South Madison include development regulations, wildlife preservation, private property rights, open space preservation, and water quality and quantity. Concentrated citizen-driven efforts to explore zoning regulations and other resource availability studies are pursuing best planning practices for responsible development.



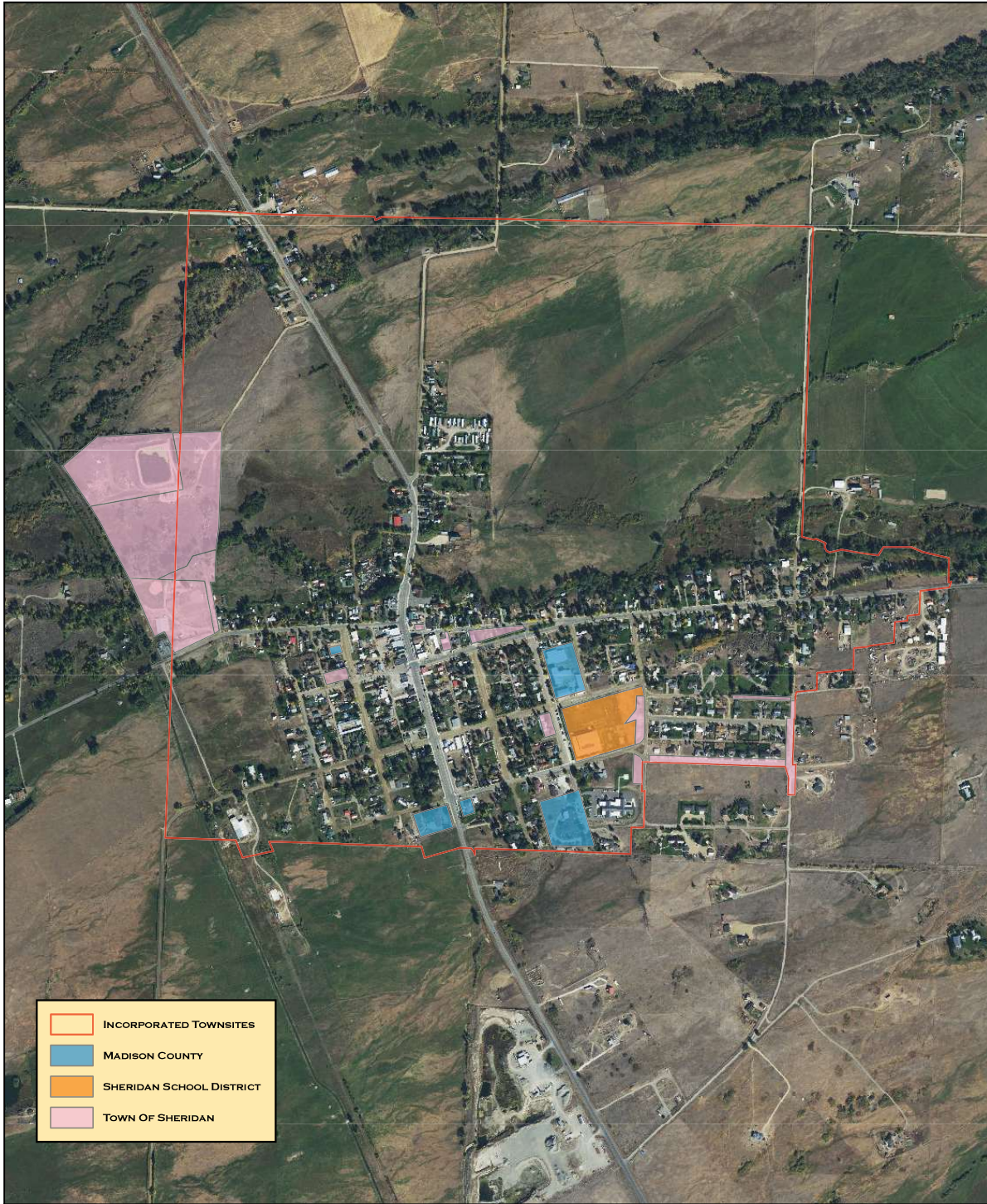
▼ Map 1. Location of Madison County, Montana

## MADISON COUNTY



▼ Map 2. Incorporated Limits of Sheridan

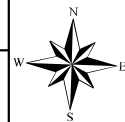
## TOWN OF SHERIDAN



	INCORPORATED TOWNSITES
	MADISON COUNTY
	SHERIDAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
	TOWN OF SHERIDAN

0 0.13 0.25 0.5  
MILES

0 1,250 2,500  
US FEET



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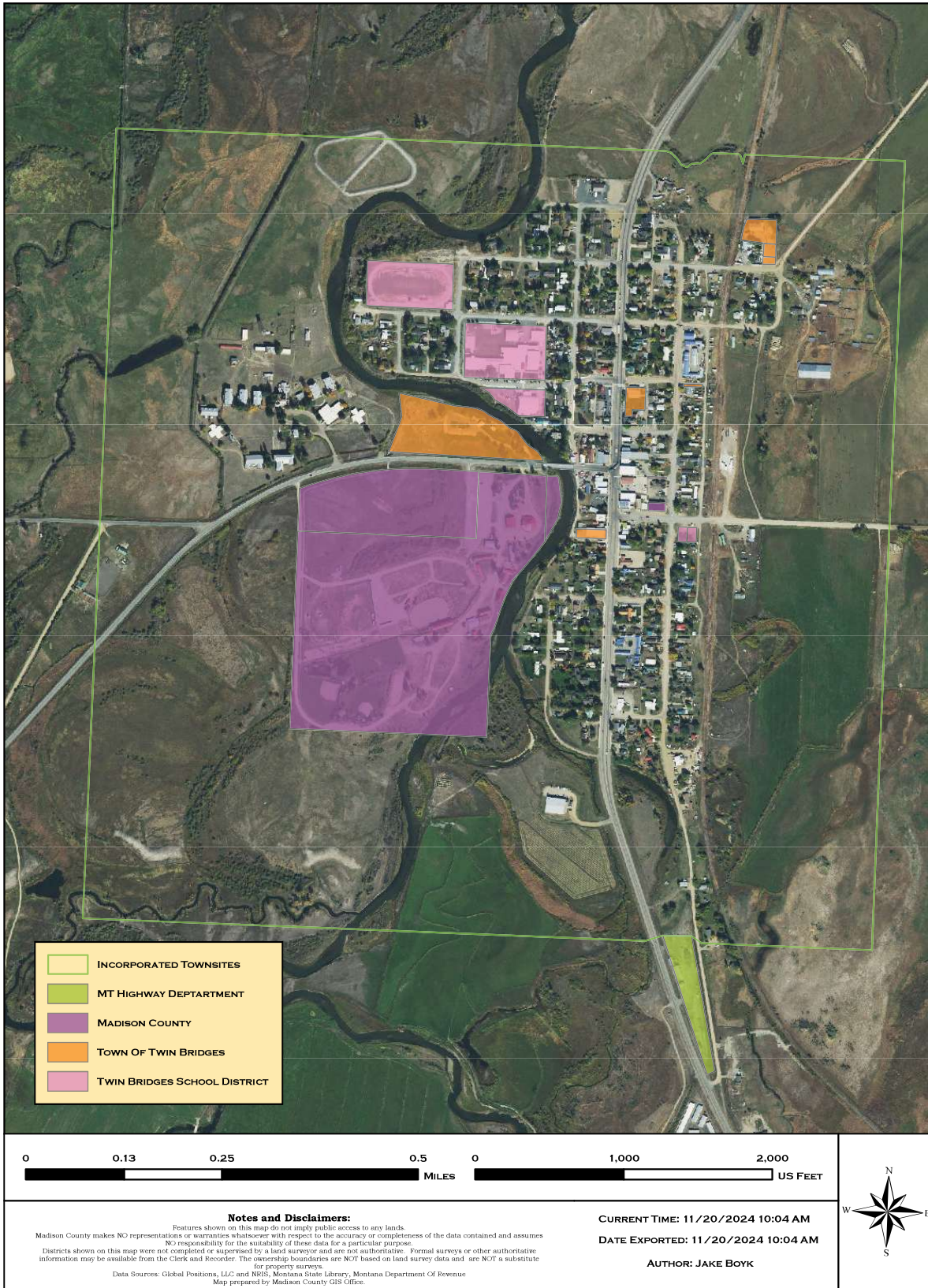
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AUTHOR: JAKE BOYK

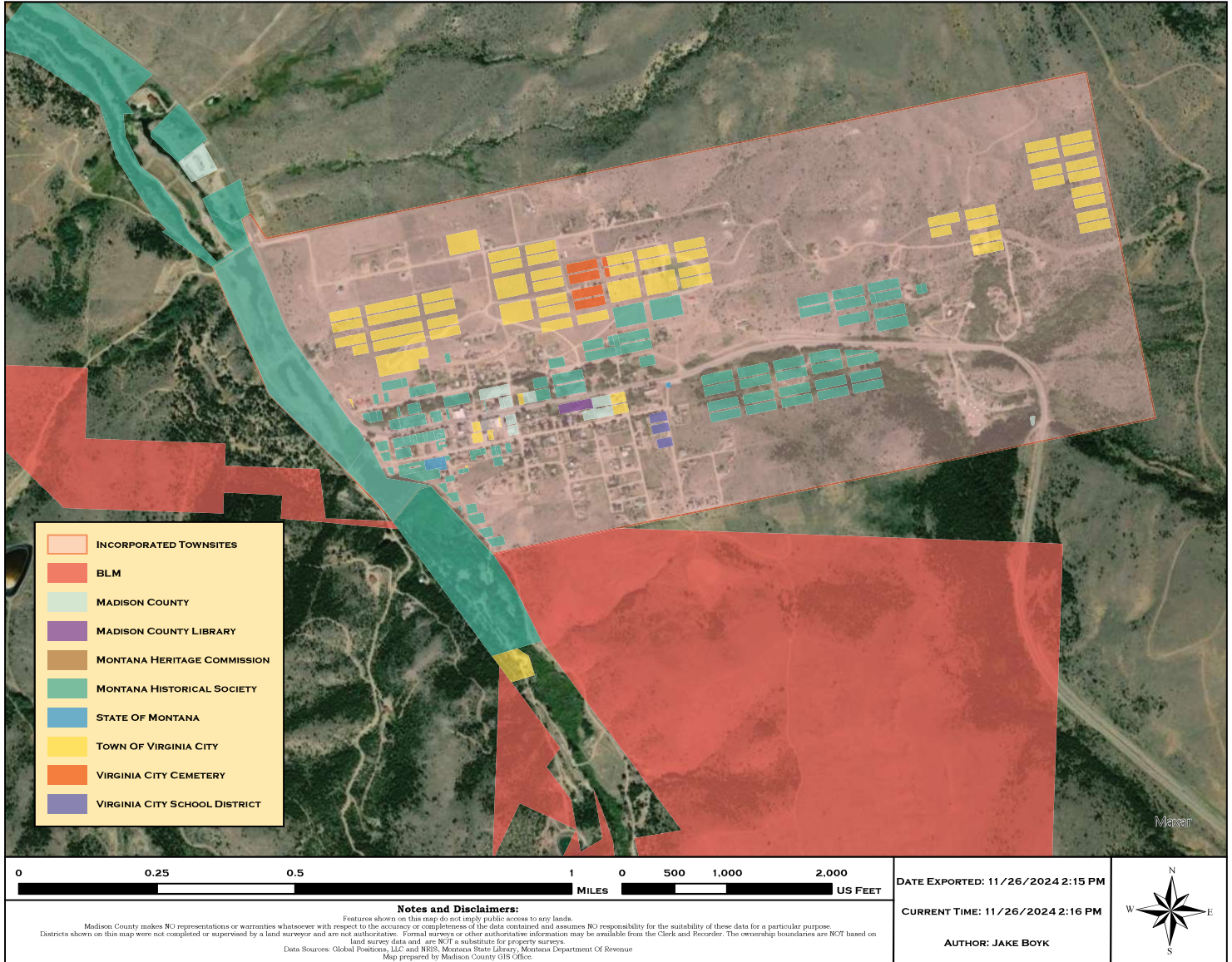
▼ Map 3. Incorporated Limits of Twin Bridges

## TOWN OF TWIN BRIDGES



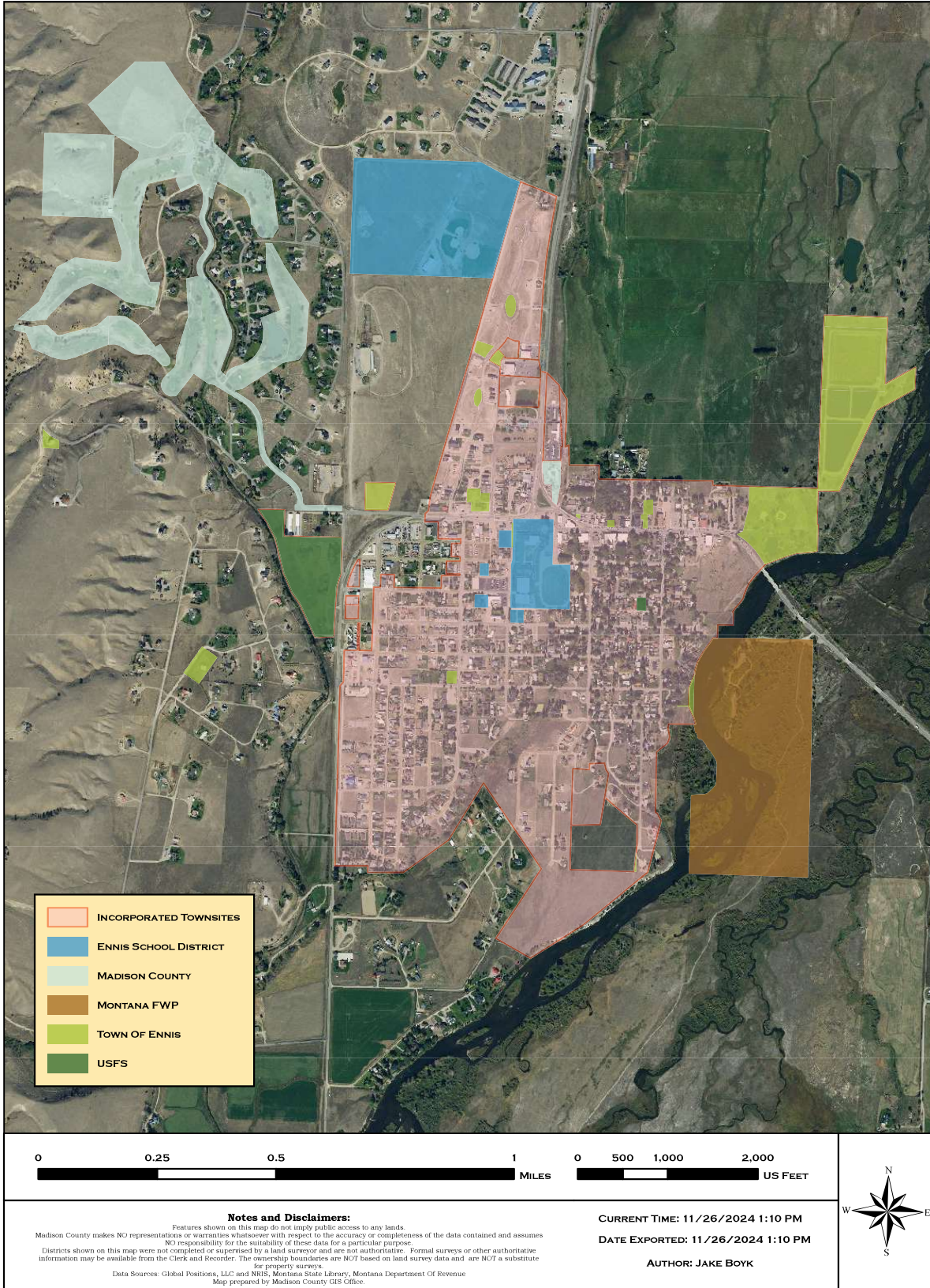
▼ Map 4. Incorporated Limits of Virginia City

## TOWN OF VIRGINIA CITY



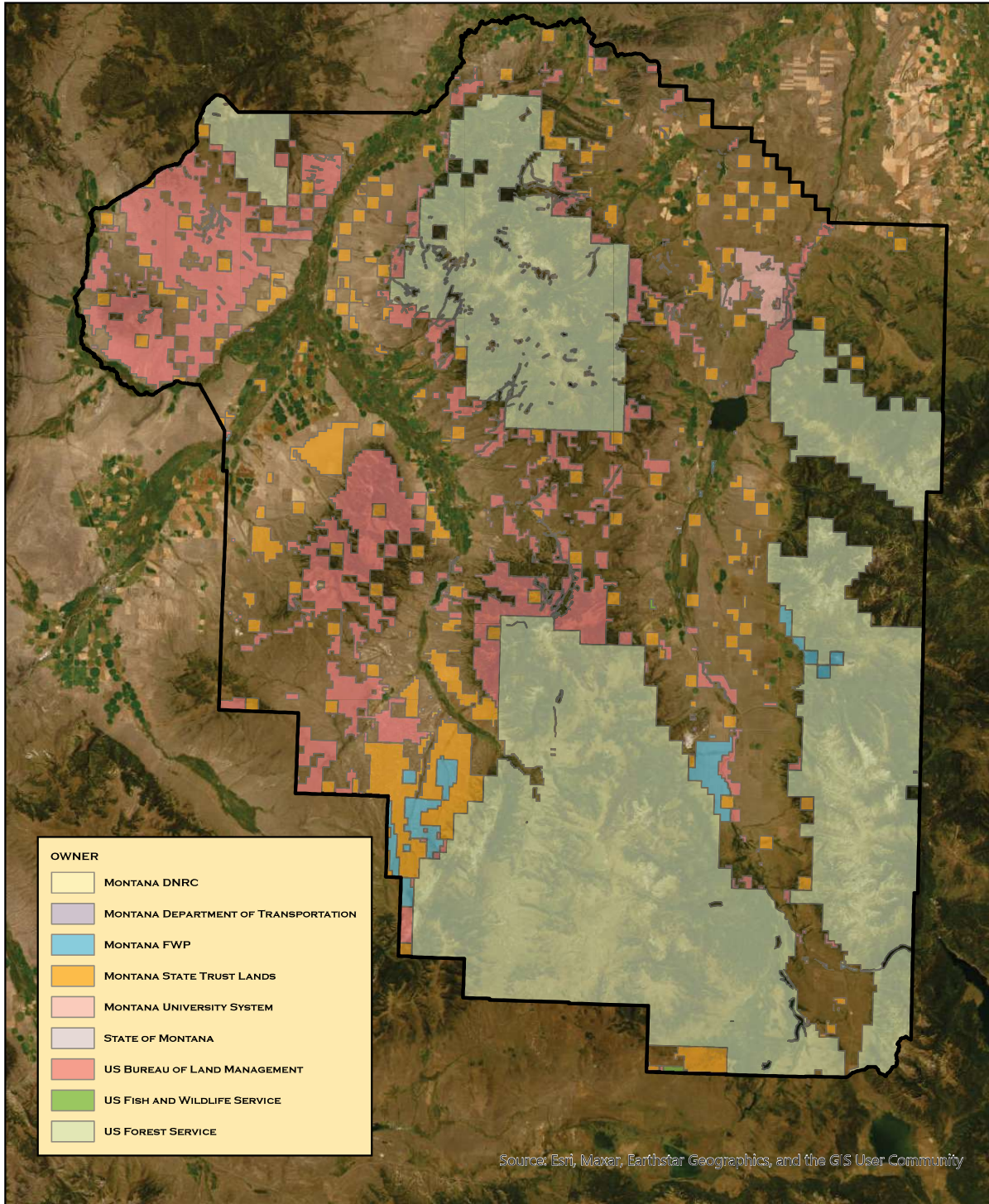
▼ Map 5. Incorporated Limits of Ennis

## TOWN OF ENNIS



▼ Map 6. Madison County Land Use

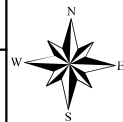
## MONTANA LAND USAGE



Source: Esri, Maxar, Earthstar Geographics, and the GIS User Community

0 5 10 20  
MILES

0 45,000 90,000  
US FEET



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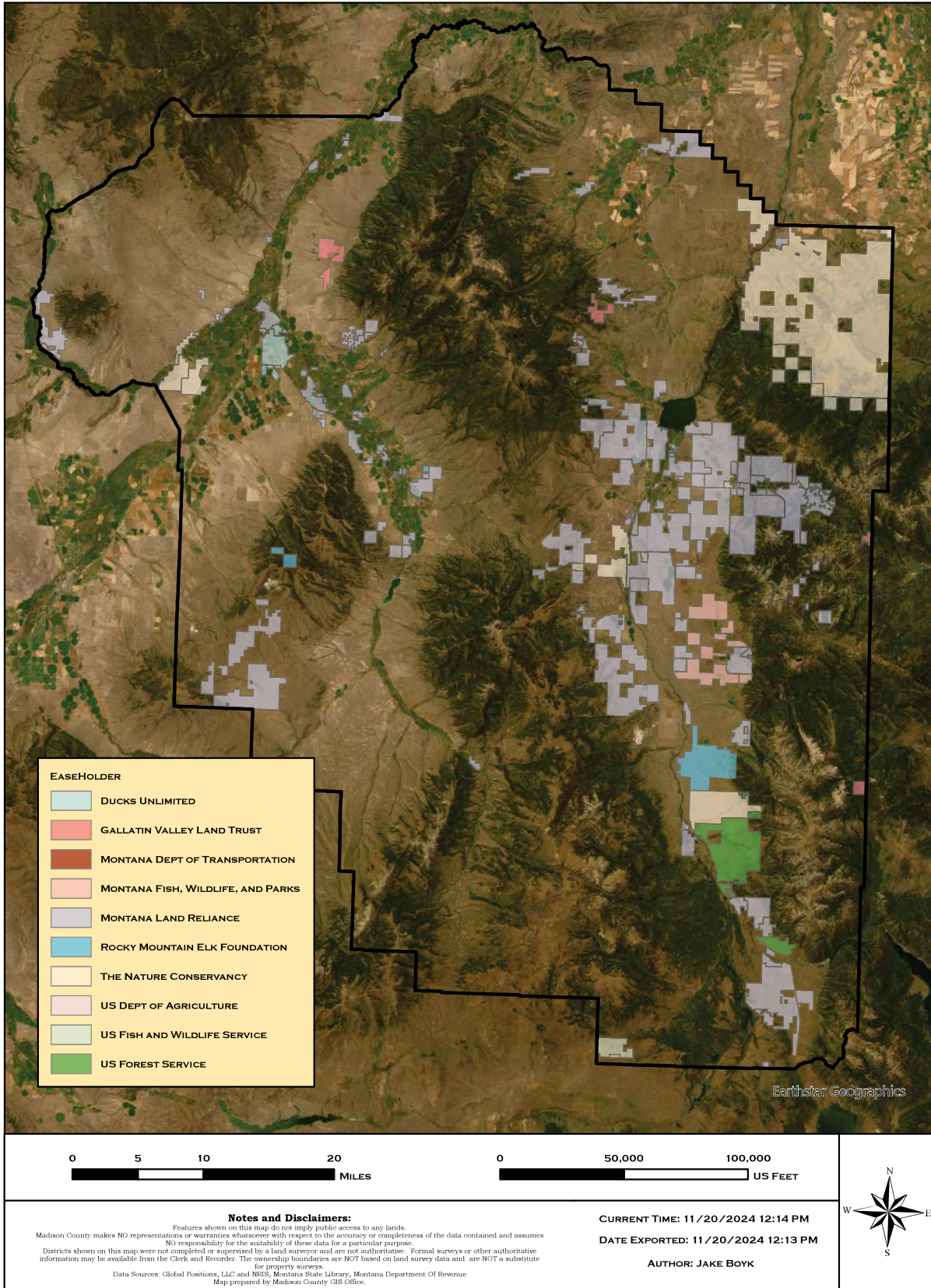
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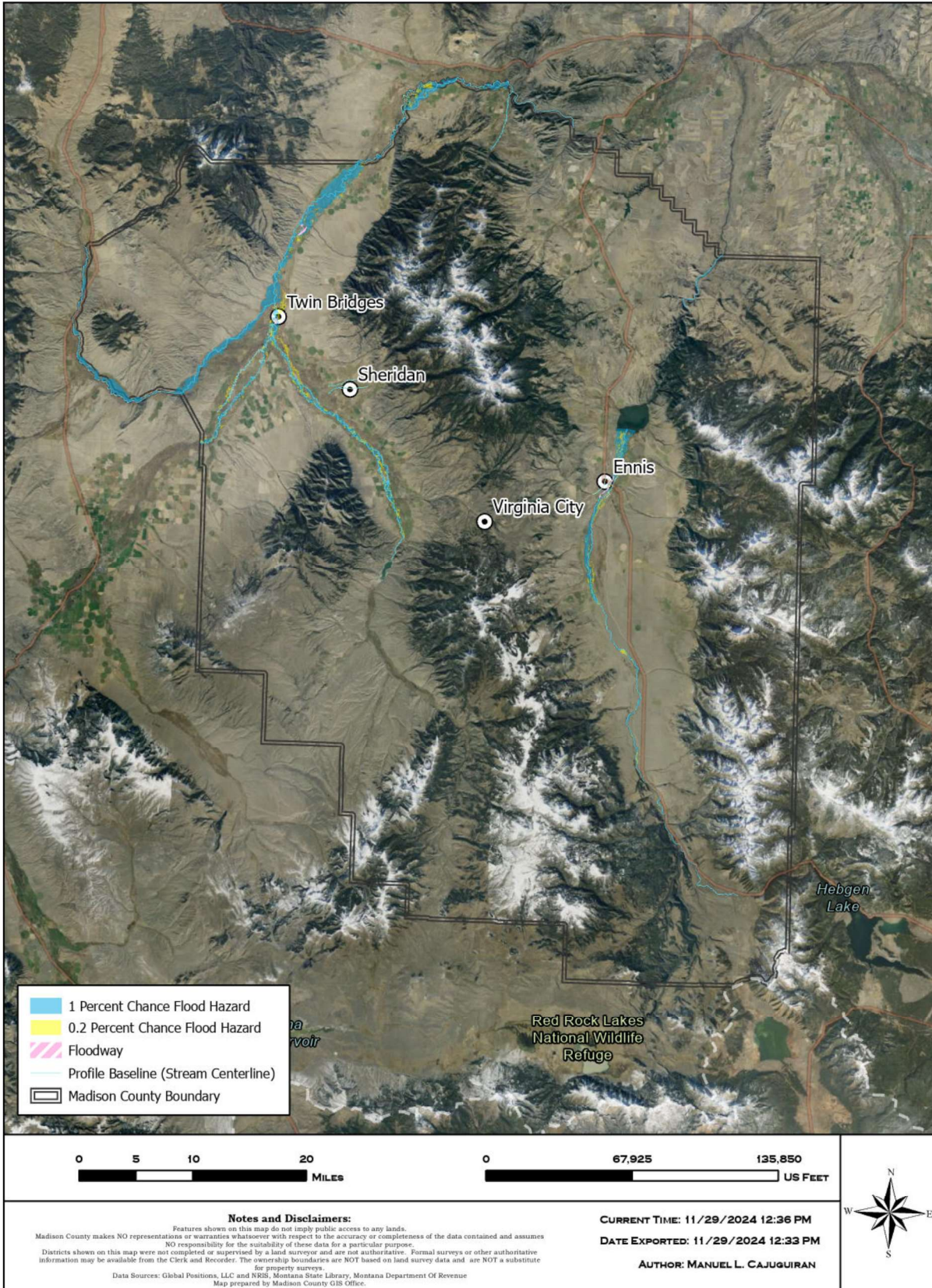
▼ Map 7. Conservation Easements in Madison County

## CONSERVATION EASEMENTS



▼ Map 8. Madison County Floodplains

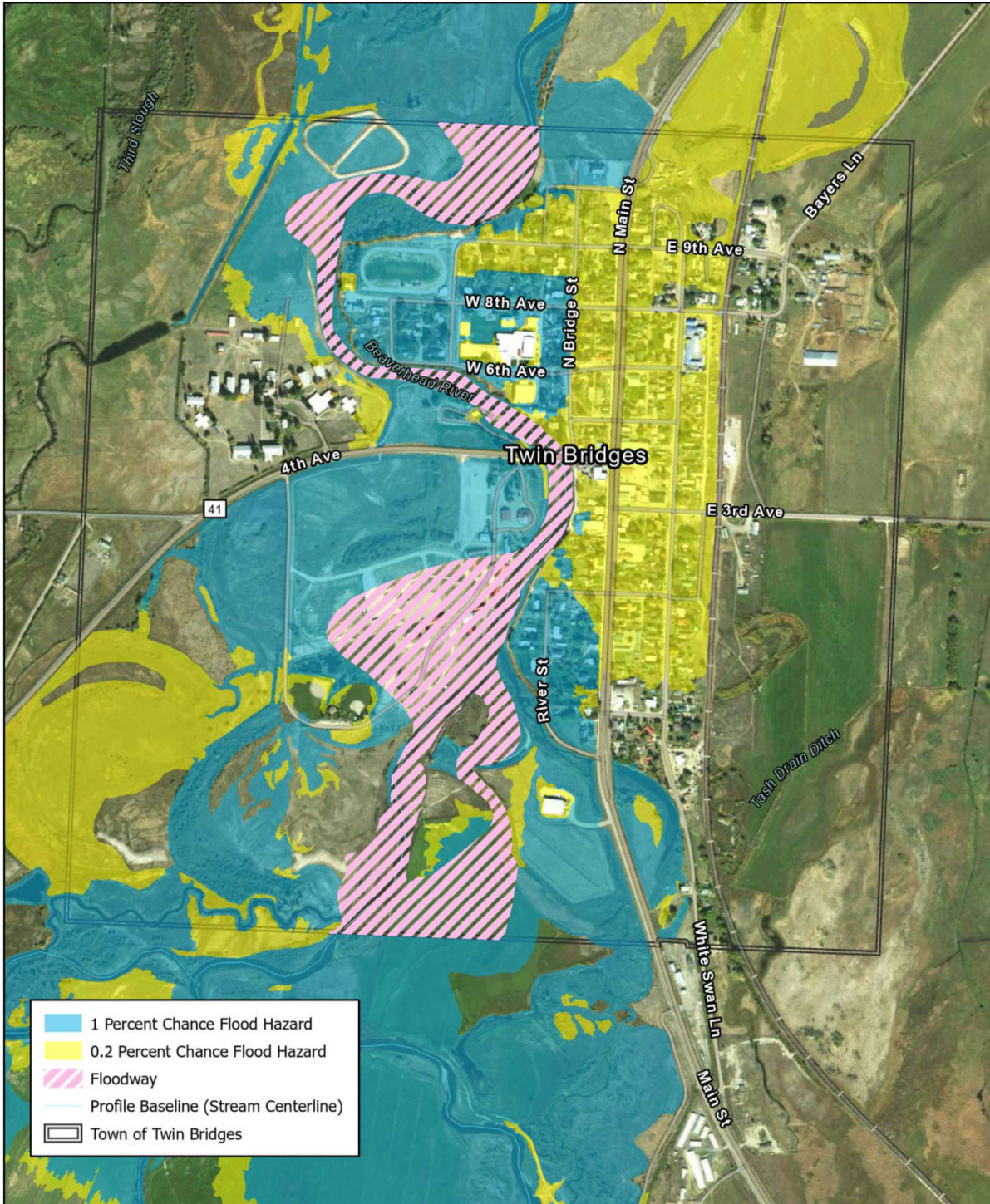
## MAPPED FLOODPLAIN AREAS MADISON COUNTY MONTANA



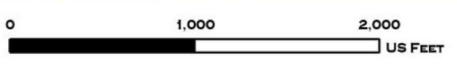
▼ Map 9. Twin Bridges Floodplain

## MAPPED FLOODPLAIN AREAS

TWIN BRIDGES  
MONTANA



	1 Percent Chance Flood Hazard
	0.2 Percent Chance Flood Hazard
	Floodway
	Profile Baseline (Stream Centerline)
	Town of Twin Bridges



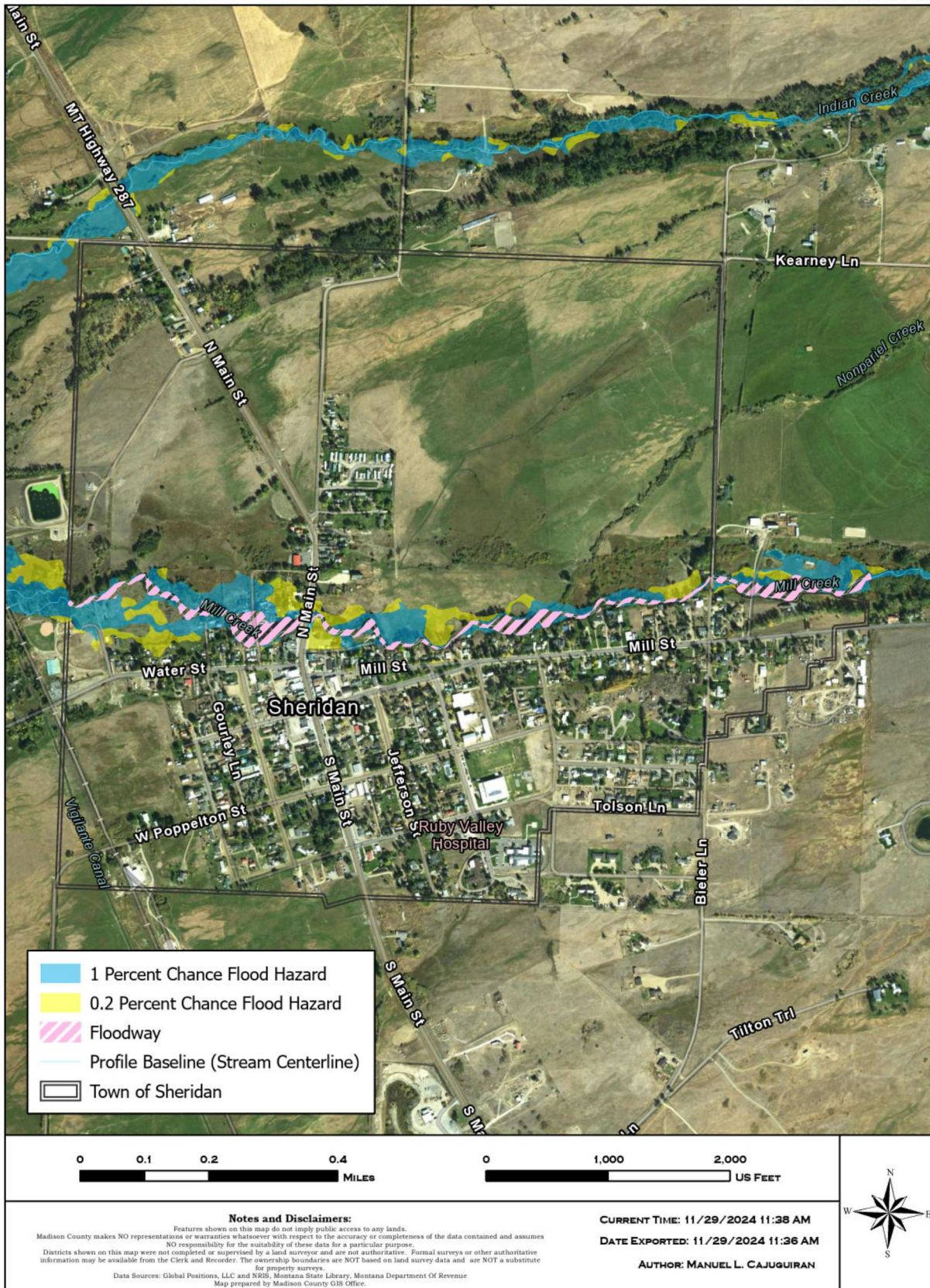
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 AUTHOR: MANUEL L. CAJUGUIRAN

▼ Map 10. Sheridan Floodplain

## MAPPED FLOODPLAIN AREAS

SHERIDAN  
MONTANA



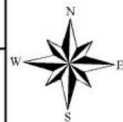
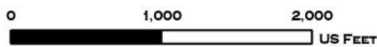
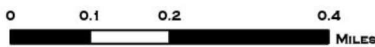
▼ Map 11. Ennis Floodplain

## MAPPED FLOODPLAIN AREAS

ENNIS  
MONTANA



	1 Percent Chance Flood Hazard
	0.2 Percent Chance Flood Hazard
	Floodway
	Profile Baseline (Stream Centerline)
	Town of Ennis



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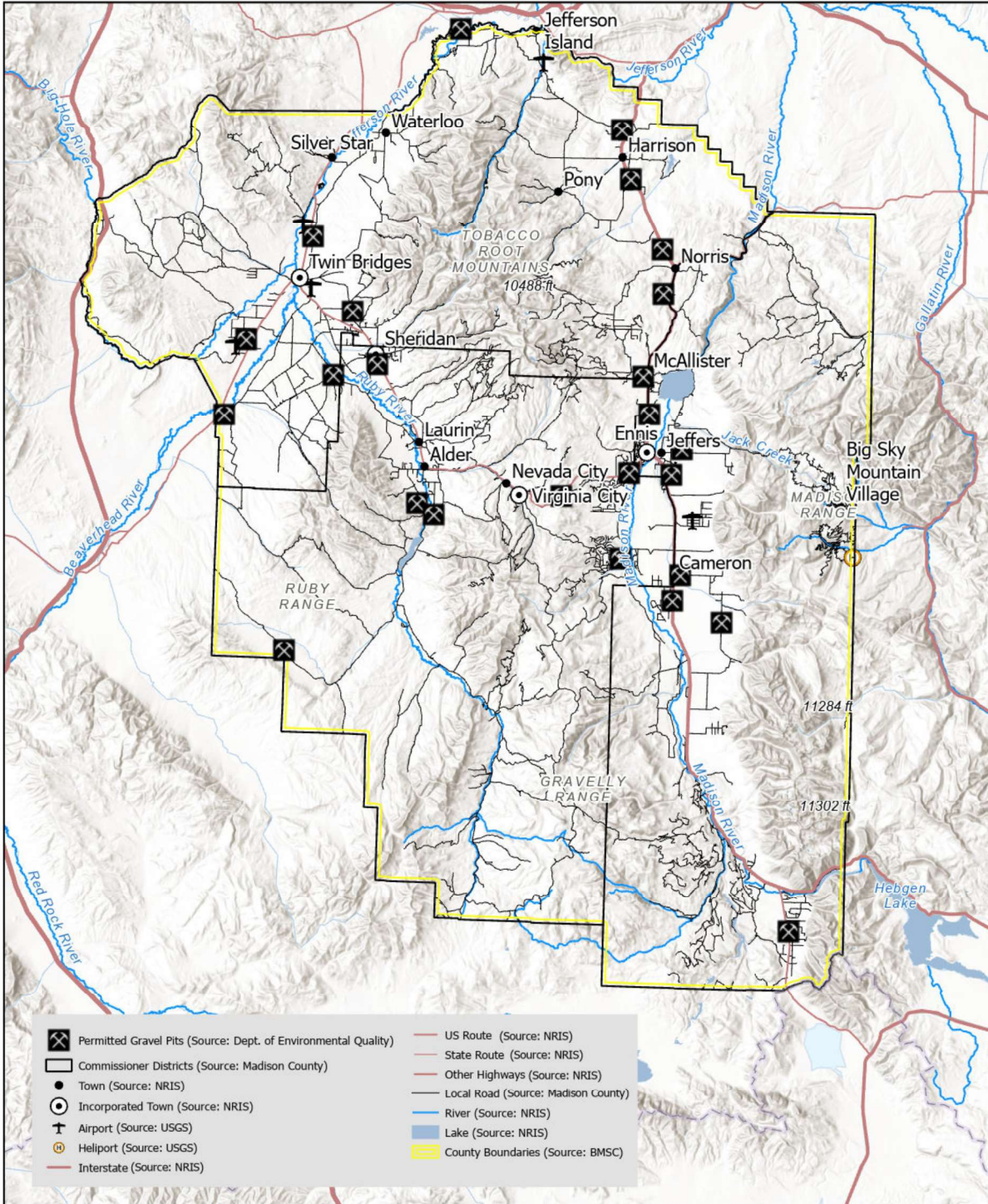
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# MAPS

▼ Map 12. Sand and Gravel Operations/Sites

## SAND AND GRAVEL RESOURCES

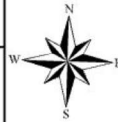
## MADISON COUNTY MONTANA



- Permitted Gravel Pits (Source: Dept. of Environmental Quality)
- Commissioner Districts (Source: Madison County)
- Town (Source: NRIS)
- Incorporated Town (Source: NRIS)
- Airport (Source: USGS)
- Heliport (Source: USGS)
- Interstate (Source: NRIS)
- US Route (Source: NRIS)
- State Route (Source: NRIS)
- Other Highways (Source: NRIS)
- Local Road (Source: Madison County)
- River (Source: NRIS)
- Lake (Source: NRIS)
- County Boundaries (Source: BMSC)

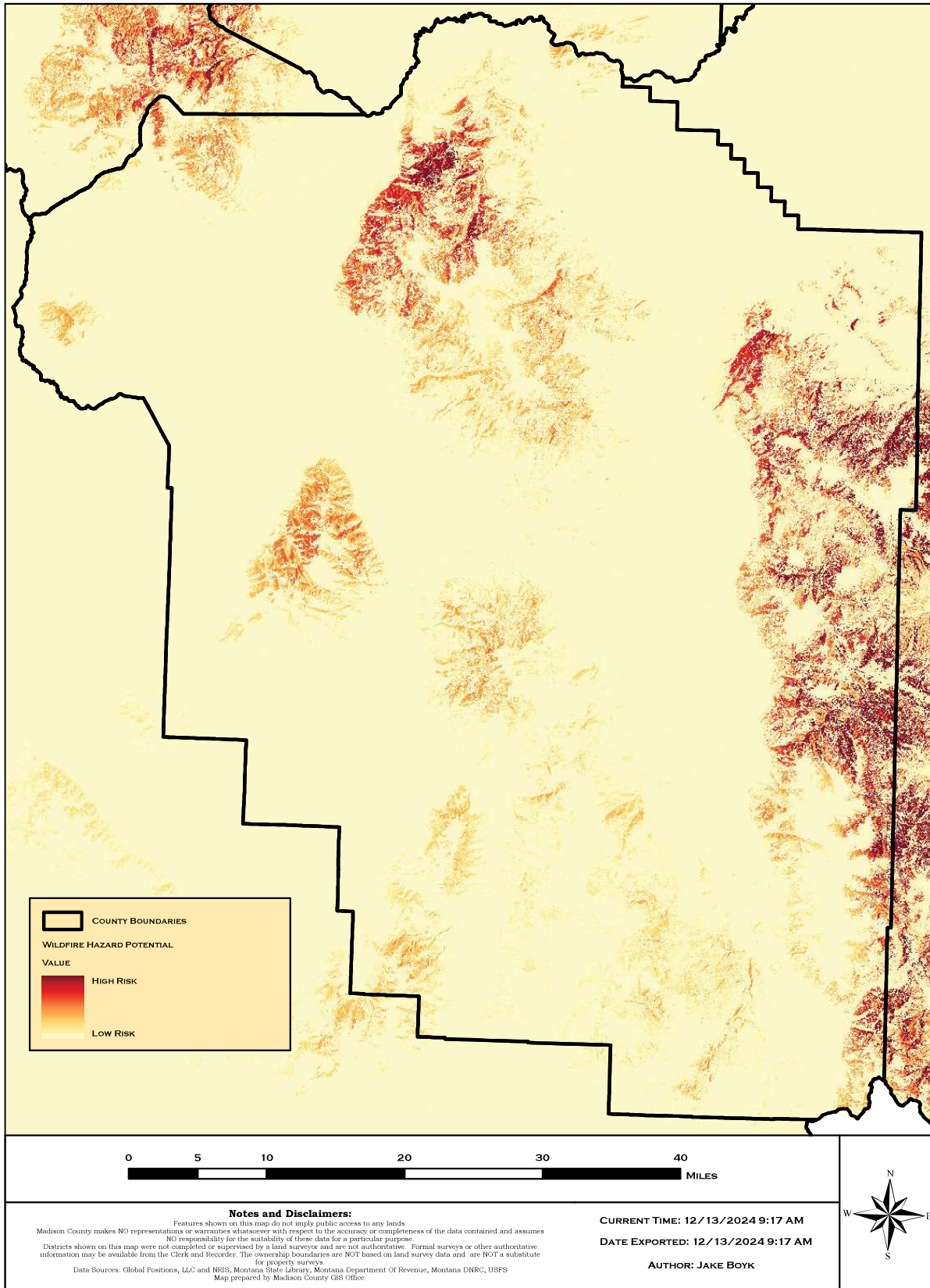
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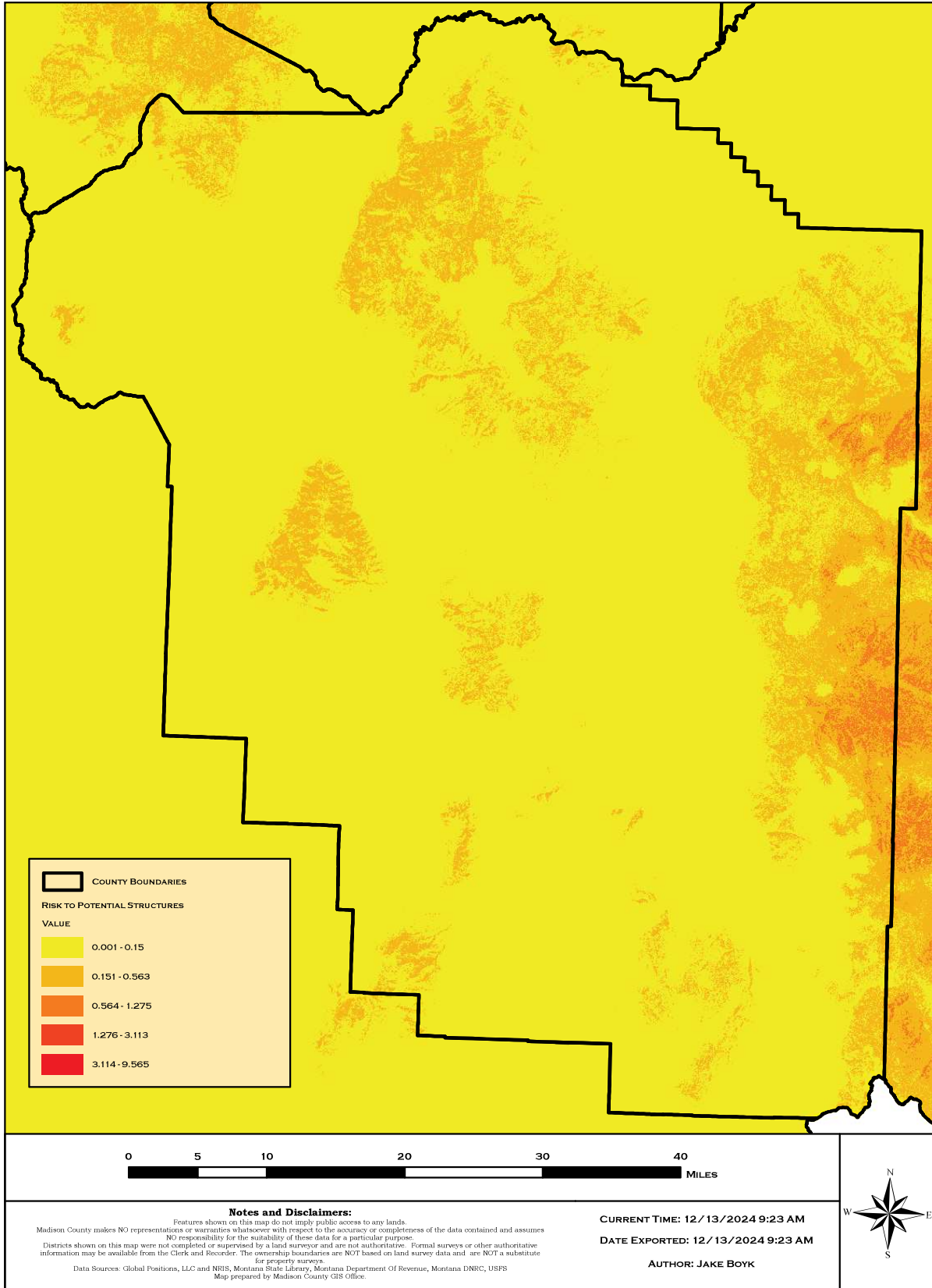
▼ Map 13. Wildfire Hazard Potential (WUI)

## USFS WILDFIRE HAZARD POTENTIAL



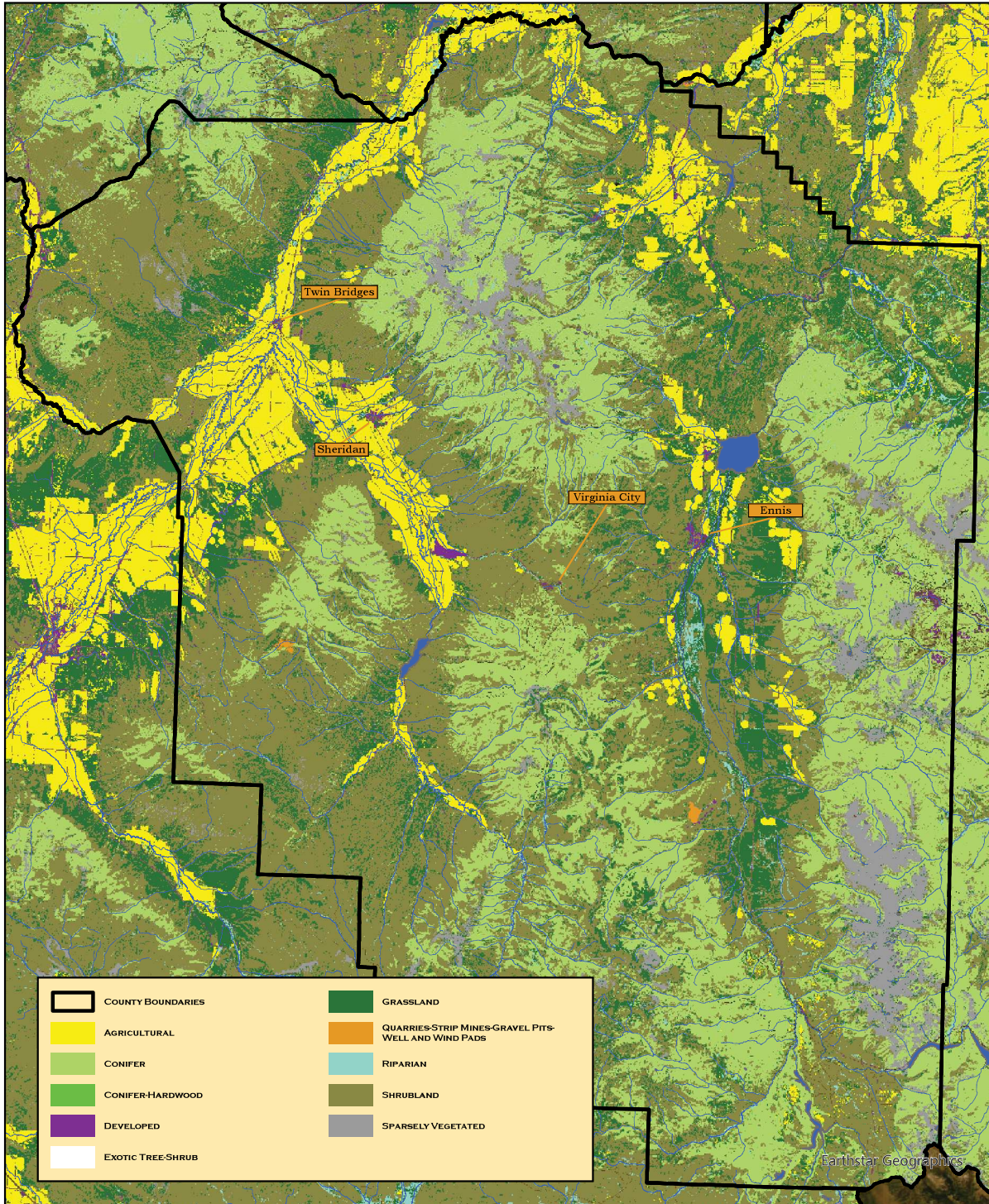
▼ Map 14. Wildfire Risk to Structures

## USFS RISK TO POTENTIAL STRUCTURES

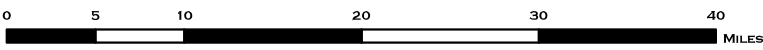


▼ Map 15. Wildfire Fuel Types

## MONTANA STATE LIBRARY FUEL TYPES



	COUNTY BOUNDARIES		GRASSLAND
	AGRICULTURAL		QUARRIES-STRIP MINES-GRAVEL PITS- WELL AND WIND PADS
	CONIFER		RIPARIAN
	CONIFER-HARDWOOD		SHRUBLAND
	DEVELOPED		SPARSELY VEGETATED
	EXOTIC TREE-SHRUB		

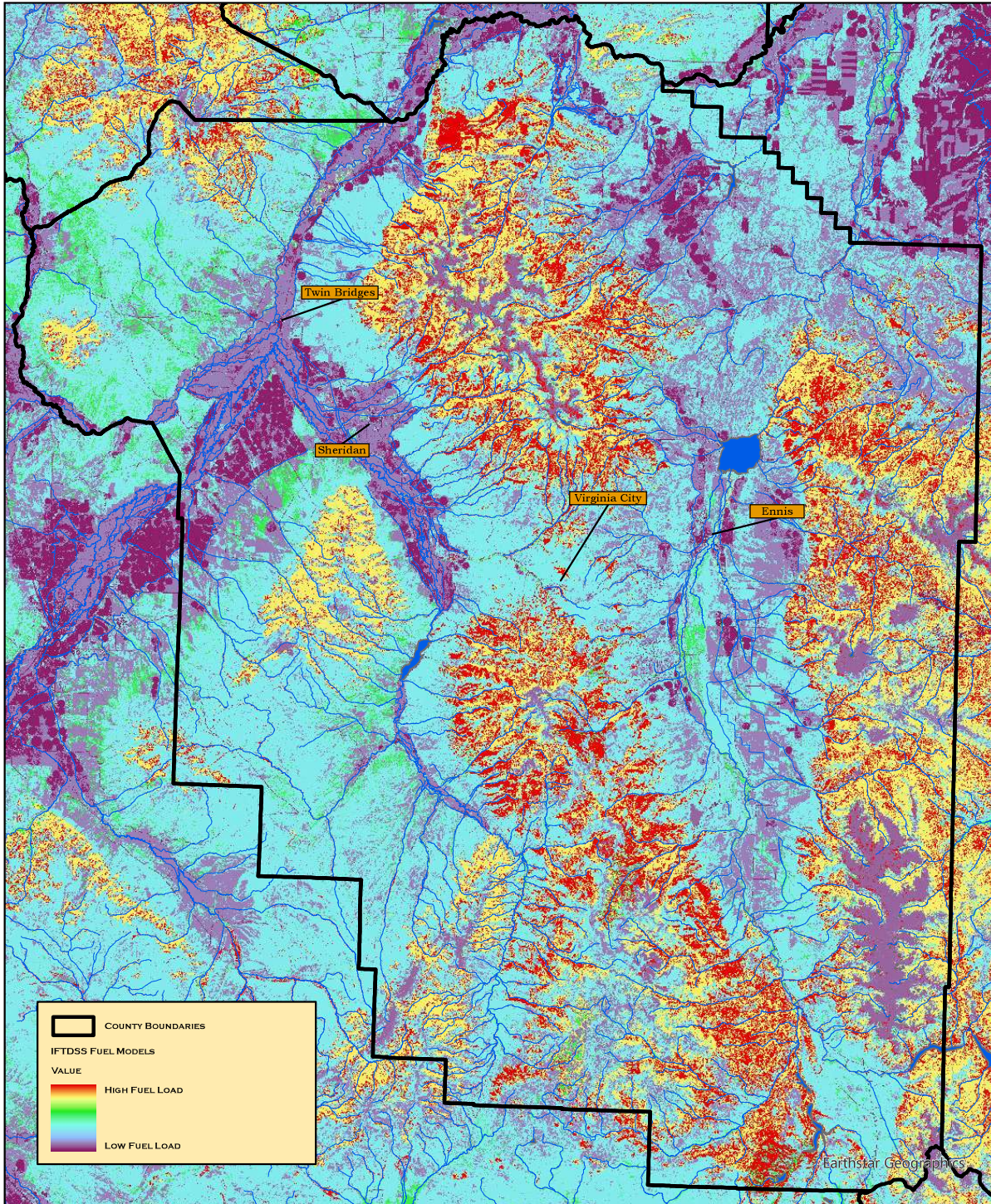


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 Map prepared by Madison County GIS Office.

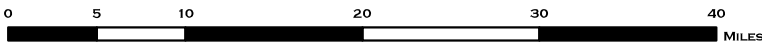
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 AUTHOR: JAKE BOYK

▼ Map 16. Wildfire Fuel Loads

## IFTDSS FUEL LOADS



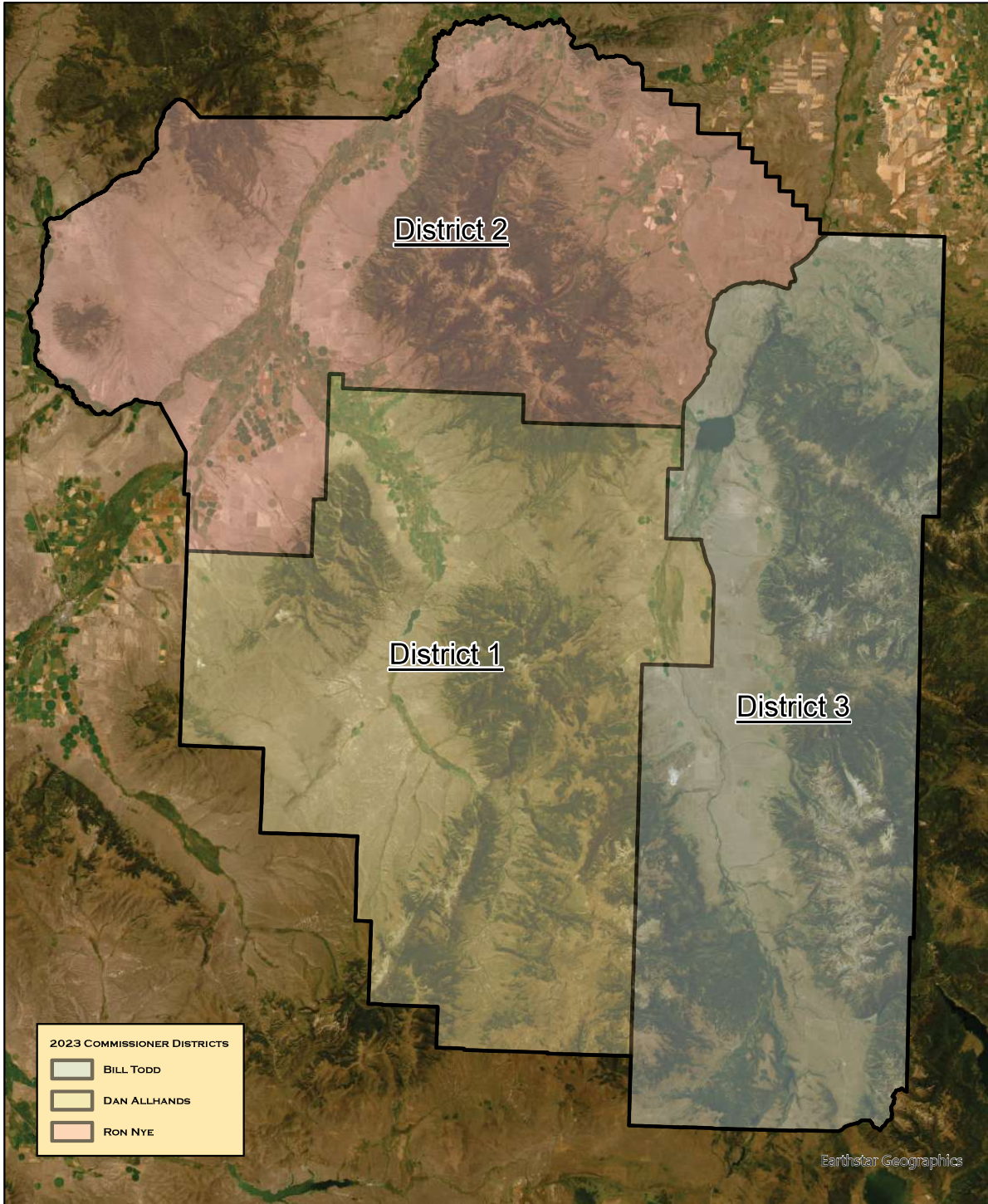
COUNTY BOUNDARIES  
 IFTDSS FUEL MODELS  
 VALUE  
 HIGH FUEL LOAD  
 LOW FUEL LOAD



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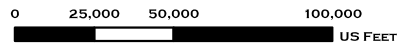
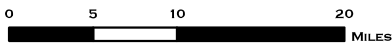
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 AUTHOR: JAKE BOYK

## COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS



**2023 COMMISSIONER DISTRICTS**

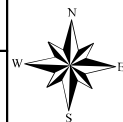
- BILL TODD
- DAN ALLHANDS
- RON NYE



Earthstar Geographics

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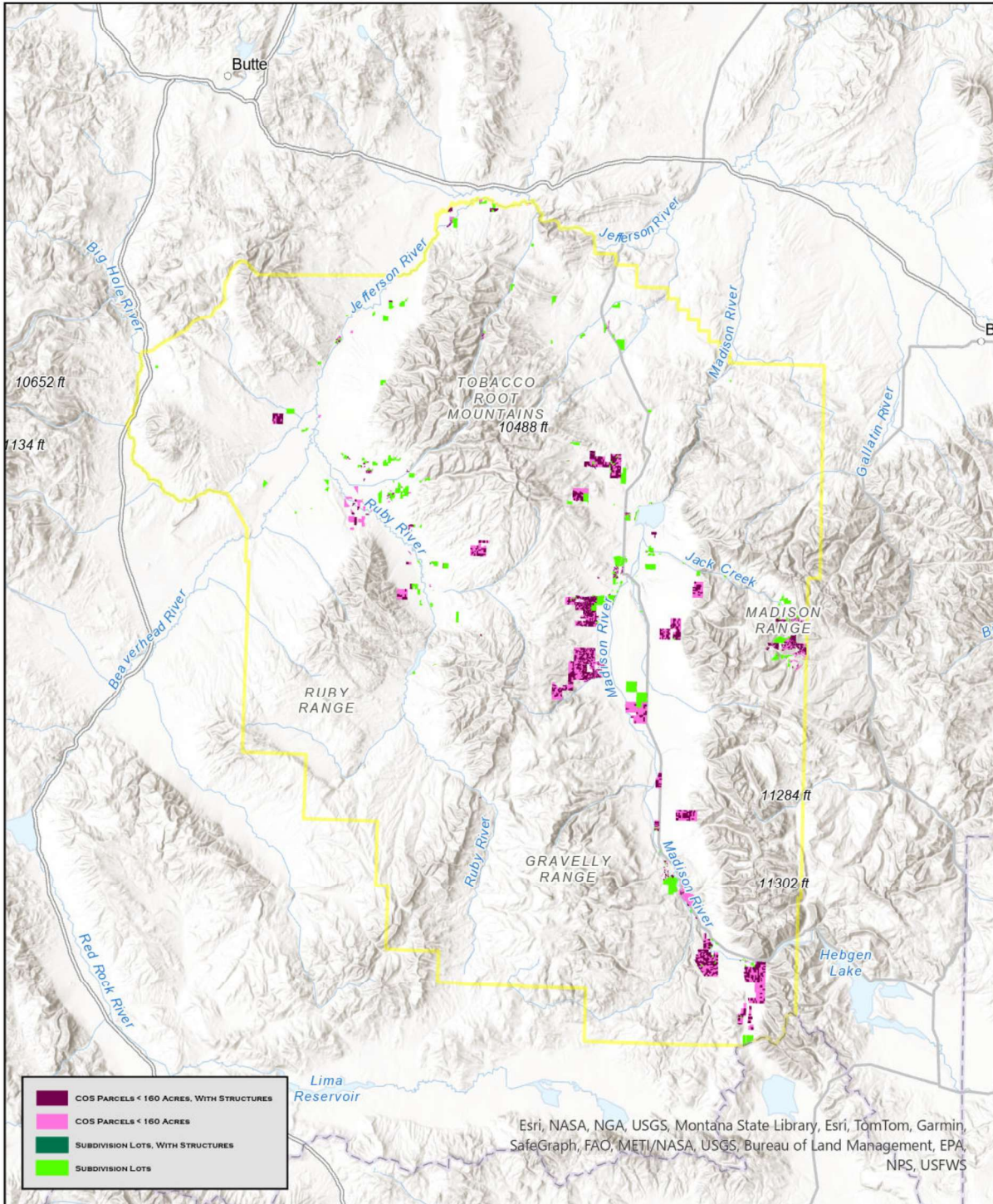


# MAPS

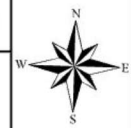
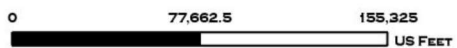
▼ Map 18. Subdivision Lots and Parcels Created Through Subdivision

## SUBDIVISION LOTS AND PARCELS CREATED THROUGH COS, WITH AND WITHOUT STRUCTURES

## MADISON COUNTY MONTANA



Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, Montana State Library, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, Bureau of Land Management, EPA, NPS, USFWS



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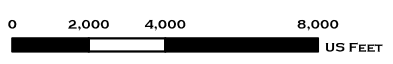
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**AUTHOR:** MANUEL L. CAJUGUIRAN

▼ Map 19. Twin Bridges Airport Affect Area

## TWIN BRIDGES AIRPORT AFFECTED AREA



TWIN BRIDGES AAA WITH REGULATORY EXCLUSION



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DATE EXPORTED: 11/26/2024 10:14 AM  
AUTHOR: JAKE BOYK

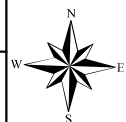
## ENNIS AIRPORT AFFECTED AREA



ENNIS AAA WITH REGULATORY EXCLUSION AREA

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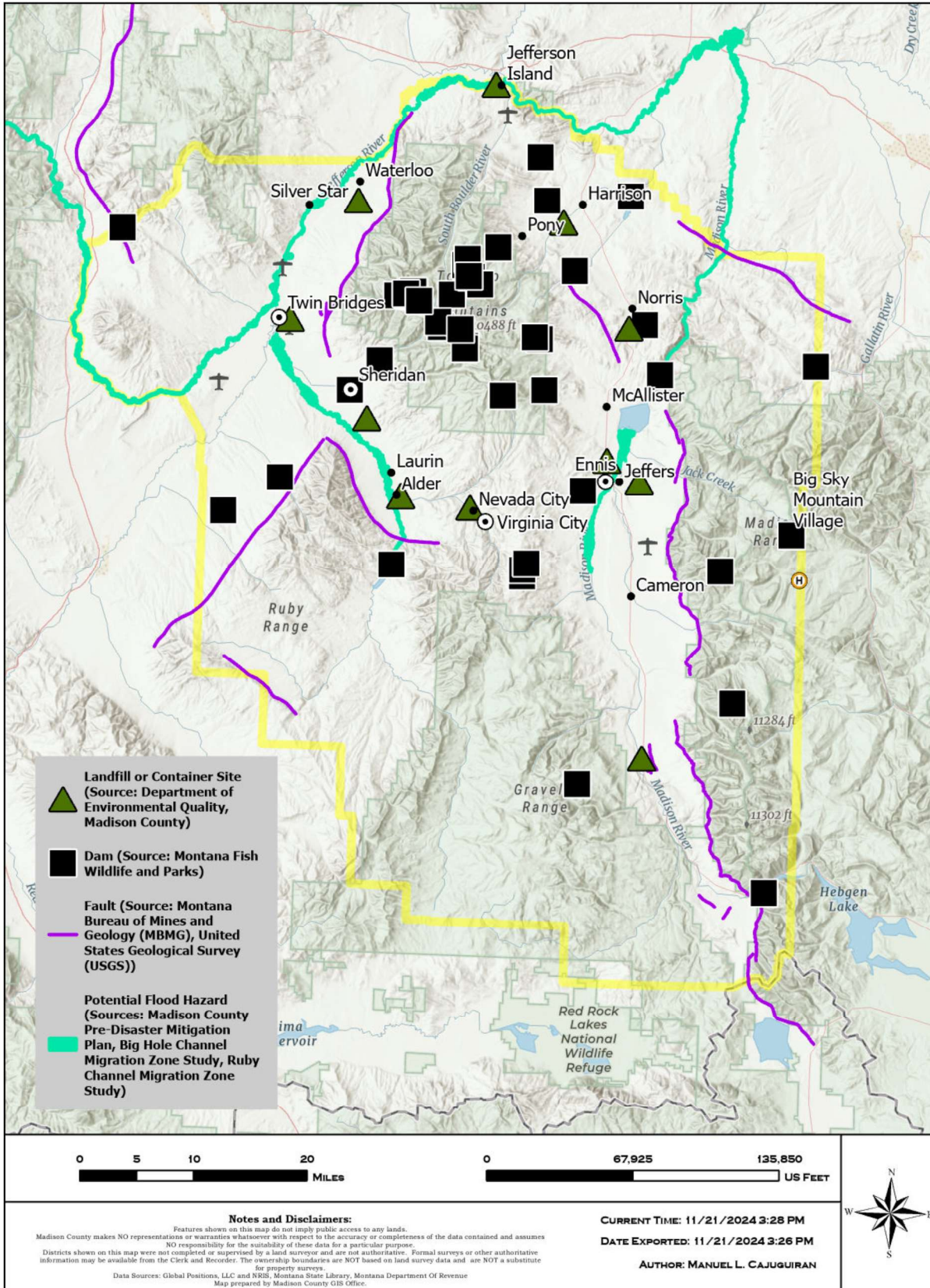


**Notes and Disclaimers:**  
Features shown on this map do not imply public access to any lands.  
Madison County makes NO representations or warranties whatsoever with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the data contained and assumes NO responsibility for the suitability of these data for a particular purpose.  
Districts shown on this map were not completed or supervised by a land surveyor and are not authoritative. Formal surveys or other authoritative information may be available from the Clerk and Recorder. The ownership boundaries are NOT based on land survey data and are NOT a substitute for property surveys.  
Data Sources: Global Positions, LLC and NRS, Montana State Library, Montana Department Of Revenue  
Map prepared by Madison County GIS Office.

CURRENT TIME: 11/26/2024 10:16 AM  
DATE EXPORTED: 11/26/2024 10:15 AM  
AUTHOR: JAKE BOYK

▼ Map 21. Potential Hazards

## POTENTIAL HAZARDS



# ACTION PLAN

Implementation of goals identified in this Growth Policy will take time and resources. Most important, it will require a commitment by County residents and the Board of Commissioners to follow through on the guidance provided by the document. The projects and policies to be pursued by the County are identified below by the general category they fall under.

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Schedule
MC1, MC3, MC8, MC11, RV11, NC2, NC9, MV3, MV4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with towns to identify areas for potential development.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board, Housing Advisory Board/Housing Coordinator	2026
MC2, RV1, MV1, BS1,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the impacts of STRs on affordable housing in Madison County.</li> </ul>	Housing Coordinator/Housing Advisory Board	2026
MC2, RV1, NC1, MV1, BS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the efforts of the Housing Advisory Board to explore options to improve the affordability of housing.</li> </ul>	Planning Board, Commissioners	Ongoing
MC3, RV3, NC3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify areas of high-value agricultural land.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027
MC3, RV3, NC3, MV8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the Madison County Weed District in weed control efforts.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board, Commissioners	Ongoing
MC3, MC4, MC9, MC10, RV7, RV8, RV10, NC7, NC8, BS2, BS8, BS9, SM2, SM4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop Sensitive Lands Mapping to determine areas unsuitable for high-density development.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027
MC4, MC7, MC8, MV2, MV4, BS2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate the need for adopting a Land Use Plan.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	2029
MC5, MC8, MC11, RV7, NC2, MV4, BS4, SM2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify areas not suitable for high-density development, based on fire risk, resource availability, dam safety, wildlife conflict, and emergency services availability.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027
MC5, MV6, BS3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amend the Pre-Construction Safety Review process to reflect informed development and construction by utilizing guidance from the CWPP and other resources.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, GIS, OEM, Commissioners	2027
MC6, RV2, BS7, MV5, SM1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate informational discussions on zoning, including methods, types, and pros/cons of zoning.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	2026

# ACTION PLAN

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Schedule
MC7, MC15, MV2, BS11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer community outreach events in the form of community forums and informational workshops, focused on property rights and land use law.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2026
RV2, RV3, NC3, MV3, BS4, SM2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support conservation easements and conservation efforts of private landowners.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	Ongoing
RV4, NC6, MV10, BS6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer funding support for infrastructure improvements via grant application letters of support and assistance in obtaining match funds.</li> </ul>	Commissioners	Ongoing
MC16, RV5, MV13, BS5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate the development of a Master Trails/Transportation Plan.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	2028
RV6, NC5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research regulatory and non-regulatory processes for encouraging historic preservation.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027
MC17, NC10, MV11, BS12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Initiate discussions on satellite office hours for specific County departments and offer consistent community workshops.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Commissioners	2026
MC10, MV7, BS9, SM4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collate all existing groundwater data within the County and pursue grant funding for updated groundwater studies in areas experiencing development pressure.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027
MC13, MV10, BS6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update the County Capital Improvements Plan.</li> </ul>	Commissioners	2028
MC14, RV12, MV12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate and amend Interlocal Agreements to reflect current needs and opportunities for support.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2026
BS1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research methods for promoting workforce housing development in areas not zoned.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2028
BS6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adopt any community plans specific to improving infrastructure.</li> </ul>	Commissioners	Ongoing
MC12, BS10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Update the County Schedule of Fees to include reasonable fee-for-service rates, where appropriate.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2026
MC12, BS10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research the feasibility of implementing Impact Fees.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	2028
BS11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively initiate frequent and consistent discussions on projects and processes within Big Sky.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	Ongoing
RV9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continually review and amend subdivision regulations to require appropriate water resource availability information.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Planning Board	Ongoing

# ACTION PLAN

Objective	Action	Responsibility	Schedule
MC13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research funding opportunities for infrastructure improvements in unincorporated communities.</li> </ul>	Planning Department, Grant Administrator	2027
MC1, RV1, MV1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support towns with the development of an Annexation Plan for lands adjacent to town boundaries.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	2027



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GROWTH POLICY

## RESIDENT OUTREACH

Gathering the ideas and advice of County residents was a critical step in creating this Growth Policy. The creation, objectives, and action plan have been created from the input of County residents in the months prior to the adoption of the document.

The County created a community survey to assist in gathering input from residents about what opportunities and issues were priorities, what they like/dislike about living in Madison County, and what they envision for the future of the County. The survey was available to residents in a hardcopy format and online. 445 people participated in the survey. This feedback is reflected throughout the document and has also been described by geographical community, as the priorities throughout the County vary depending on location.

In addition to the community survey, five community forum events were hosted by the Planning Department. These forums ranged in attendance from less than six attendees to more than 50 attendees. Community forums were hosted in Cameron, Big Sky, Pony, Sheridan and Ennis.

The community survey and community forums were advertised on social media forums, at local businesses and County service locations, and in local online and print media outlets including The Madisionian. Additionally, NBC Montana featured a story on community outreach efforts for the Growth Policy.

## GROWTH POLICY ADOPTION

The Planning Board held a public hearing on \_\_\_\_\_, to hear public comment on the Growth Policy document and recommend adoption to the County Commission. The Commission held a public hearing on \_\_\_\_\_ to consider the Planning Board's recommendation. The Commission voted on \_\_\_\_\_ to formally adopt the Growth Policy.

## CONDITIONS AND TIMING FOR REVIEW AND REVISION

This document will be reviewed every five years from the date of its adoption. The Planning Board will be responsible for reviewing the Growth Policy and making any recommendations regarding updates or amendments to the County Commission. Future reviews will include an evaluation



**MADISON COUNTY GROWTH POLICY**

The County is working on updating its community plan (Growth Policy). The Growth Policy is meant to be a guide for addressing the various issues and opportunities that County residents face. To ensure that the updated plan reflects your concerns and needs, please complete the following community survey.

**WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

**THINGS TO KNOW:**

- The survey will take less than 5 minutes.
- Your answers will be private and anonymous.
- Your answers will help us improve your community.

**THINGS WE ASK ABOUT:**

- How long you have lived in the County?
- Your preferences on managing land use and future development plans in Madison County.
- What you would like to see improved in Madison County?

SCAN THIS CODE:



<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7JGQ8XL>

You can also pick up a hardcopy version at the Planning Office located at 7 Placer Loop, Virginia City, MT 59755

For more information on this survey or the Growth Policy call 406-843-5250

The survey will be available through September 2024.



# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GROWTH POLICY

of every section. It is anticipated that a full update of the Growth Policy will be necessary within ten years of its original adoption. Additionally, wherever possible in keeping with State statute, the development and revision of future planning documents should adhere to the goals and objectives of the Growth Policy.

The Growth Policy may also be revised when a situation or issue has been identified by the public that necessitates changes or when changes are deemed to be in the best interest of the public by either the Planning Board or the County Commission. It is also possible that Legislative changes to policy statutes may require significant amendments or changes. Finally, amendments to the Growth Policy may also be necessary when litigation elsewhere in Montana sets a legal precedent that is contrary to the stated goals, objectives, or implementation strategies that have been detailed.



# SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS AND REVIEW

The Montana Code Annotated requires that the County Commission provide a statement in this plan explaining how they will:

- Define the review criteria found in 76-3-608 (3)(a) M.C.A. i.e., impacts upon agriculture, local services, public health, and safety etc.; and
- Evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to the criteria in 76-3-608 (3)(a) M.C.A.

## DEFINITION OF 76-3-608 CRITERIA

Madison County uses the following definitions as found in the current Madison County Subdivision Regulations for each of the review criteria listed below.

- **Agriculture:** All aspects of farming, including the cultivation and tillage of the soil; dairying; and the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural or horticultural commodities, including commodities defined as agricultural commodities in the federal Agricultural Marketing Act and the raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals, or poultry; and any practices, including forestry or lumbering operations, performed by a farmer or on a farm as an incident to or in conjunction with farming operations, including preparation for market or delivery to storage, to market, or to carriers for transportation market, excluding any consideration of whether the proposed subdivision will result in a loss of agricultural soils.
- **Agricultural Water User Facilities:** Those facilities which provide water for agricultural land as defined in 15-7-202, MCA, or which provide water for the production of agricultural products as defined in 15-1-101, MCA including, but not limited to ditches, pipes, and head gates.
- **Local Services:** Any and all services or facilities that local government entities are authorized to provide.
- **Natural Environment:** The physical conditions which exist within a given area, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, sound, light, and objects of historic and aesthetic significance.
- **Public Health and Safety:** Condition of optimal well-being, free from danger, risk, or injury for a community at large, or for all people, not merely for the welfare of a specific individual or a small class of persons.
- **Wildlife:** Living things which are neither human nor domesticated.
- **Wildlife Habitat:** Place or type of site where wildlife naturally lives and grows.

## EVALUATION OF SUBDIVISIONS BASED UPON 76-3-608 REVIEW CRITERIA

The review of subdivision applications by Madison County includes documentation and an analysis as to whether or not the proposed subdivision will impact agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, the natural environment, wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public health and safety.

The County will evaluate each subdivision with regard to the expected impacts upon each of the criteria and the degree to which the subdivision applicant proposes to mitigate any adverse impacts. This evaluation will be based on the subdivision application, staff review, reports, and the information gathered from public hearings and other sources of information as deemed appropriate.

Upon the County's completion of its review, evaluation, and Planning Board recommendation, the County Commission will render a decision on the proposed subdivision with respect to the requirements of the Madison County Subdivision Regulations, the Madison County Growth Policy, and the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act.

# SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS AND REVIEW

## PREREQUISITES FOR APPROVAL

The governing body may not approve or conditionally approve a subdivision application and preliminary plat unless the proposed subdivision:

- Provides easements for the location and installation of any planned utilities, both on and off site
- Provides legal and physical access to each parcel within the subdivision and the notation of that access on the applicable plat and any instrument transferring the parcel
- Assures that all required public or private improvements will be installed before final plat approval, or that their installation after final plat approval will be guaranteed as provided by Section II-B-4 of these regulations
- Assures that the requirements of 76-3-504(1)(j), MCA, regarding the disclosure and disposition of water rights as set forth in Section VI-O have been considered and will be accomplished before the final plat is submitted
- Assures that the requirements of 76-3-504(1)(k) regarding watercourse and irrigation easements as set forth in Section VI-N have been considered and will be accomplished before the final plat is submitted
- Provides for the appropriate park dedication or cash-in-lieu
- For a proposed subdivision that will create one or more parcels containing less than 20 acres, the subdivider shall obtain approval by the DEQ as a condition of approval of the final plat. This approval applies to the development of lots at the time of the approval and is no guarantee that a source of water or a location for a septic system or drain fields will be available when the lots are developed.
- For a proposed subdivision that will create one or more parcels containing 20 acres or more, the subdivider shall demonstrate in the preliminary plat application that there is an adequate water source and at least one area for a septic system and a replacement drain field for each lot. This information shall be submitted to the local reviewing authority to complete the sanitation review of parcels that do not fall under the review authority of DEQ

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR IMPACTS TO AGRICULTURE

- Is the proposed subdivision or associated improvements located on or near prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service? If so, identify each area on a copy of the preliminary plat.
- Describe whether the subdivision would remove from production any agricultural or timber land.
- Describe possible conflicts with nearby agricultural operations (e.g., residential development creating problems for moving livestock, operating farm machinery, maintaining water supplies, controlling weeds, or applying pesticides; agricultural operations suffering from vandalism, uncontrolled pets or damaged fences).
- Describe possible nuisance problems which may arise from locating a subdivision near agricultural or timber lands.
- Describe the effects the subdivision would have on the value of nearby agricultural lands.
- Would the market, mortgage, and taxable value of the nearby agricultural land increase?
- Would the increased market value and condition in B, C and D above encourage further land division or otherwise remove land from production?
- Would the cost of providing additional education and other public facilities result in higher mill levies on agricultural properties?

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR EFFECTS ON AGRICULTURAL WATER USER FACILITIES

- Describe conflicts the subdivision would create with agricultural water user facilities (e.g. residential development creating problems for operating and maintaining irrigation systems) and whether agricultural water user facilities would be more subject to vandalism or damage because of the subdivision.

# SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS AND REVIEW

- Describe possible nuisance problems which the subdivision would generate with regard to agricultural water user facilities (e.g. safety hazards to residents or water problems from irrigation ditches, head gates, siphons, sprinkler systems, or other agricultural water user facilities).

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR IMPACTS TO LOCAL SERVICES

- Describe the additional or expanded public services and facilities that would be demanded of local government or special districts to serve the subdivision.
- Describe additional costs which would result for services such as roads, bridges, law enforcement, parks and recreation, fire protection, water, sewer and solid waste systems, schools or busing, (including additional personnel, construction, and maintenance costs).
- Who would bear these costs (e.g. all taxpayers within the jurisdiction, people within special taxing districts, or users of a service)?
- Can the service providers meet the additional costs given legal or other constraints (e.g. statutory ceilings on mill levies or bonded indebtedness)?
- Describe off-site costs or costs to other jurisdictions may be incurred (e.g. development of water sources or construction of a sewage treatment plant; costs borne by a nearby municipality).
- Describe how the subdivision allows existing services, through expanded use, to operate more efficiently, or makes the installation or improvement of services feasible (e.g. allow installation of a central water system or upgrading a country road).
- What are the present tax revenues received from the unsubdivided land?
- Provide the approximate revenues received by each above taxing authority if the lots are reclassified, and when the lots are all improved and built upon. Describe any other taxes that would be paid by the subdivision and into what funds (e.g. personal property taxes on mobile/manufactured homes are paid into the County general fund).
- Would new taxes generated from the subdivision cover additional public costs?
- How many special improvement districts would be created which would obligate local government fiscally or administratively? Are any bonding plans proposed which would affect the local government's bonded indebtedness?

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR IMPACTS TO THE HISTORIC OR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Describe and locate on a plat overlay or sketch map known or possible historic, paleontological, archaeological or cultural sites, structures, or objects which may be affected by the proposed subdivision. How would the subdivision affect surface and groundwater, soils, slopes, vegetation, historical or archaeological features within the subdivision or on adjacent land? Describe plans to protect these sites.
- Would any streambanks or lake shorelines be altered, streams rechanneled or any surface water contaminated from sewage treatment systems, run-off carrying sedimentation, or concentration of pesticides or fertilizers?
- Could groundwater supplies be contaminated or depleted as a result of the subdivision?
- Would construction of roads or building sites require cuts and fills on steep slopes or cause erosion on unstable, erodible soils? Would soils be contaminated by sewage treatment systems?
- Describe the impacts that the removal of vegetation would have on soil erosion, bank, or shoreline instability.
- Would the value of significant historical, visual, or open space features be reduced or eliminated?
- Describe possible natural hazards the subdivision could be subject to (e.g., natural hazards such as flooding, rock, snow or landslides, high winds, severe wildfires, or difficulties such as shallow bedrock, high water table, unstable or expansive soils, or excessive slopes).

# SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS AND REVIEW

- How would the subdivision affect visual features within the subdivision or on adjacent land? Describe efforts to visually blend the proposed development with the existing environment (e.g. use of appropriate building materials, colors, road design, underground utilities, and revegetation of earthworks).

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR IMPACTS TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Describe any health or safety hazards on or near the subdivision, such as: natural hazards, lack of water, drainage problems, heavy traffic, dilapidated structures, high-pressure gas lines, high voltage power lines, or irrigation ditches. These conditions proposed or existing should be accurately described with their origin and location identified on a copy of the preliminary plat.
- Describe how the subdivision would be subject to hazardous conditions due to high voltage lines, airports, highways, railroads, dilapidated structures, high-pressure gas lines, irrigation ditches, and adjacent industrial or mining uses.
- Describe land uses adjacent to the subdivision and how the subdivision will affect the adjacent land uses. Identify existing uses such as feed lots, processing plants, airports or industrial firms which could be subject to lawsuits or complaints from residents of the subdivision.
- Describe public health or safety hazards, such as dangerous traffic, fire conditions, or contamination of water supplies which would be created by the subdivision.

## EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

- Describe in detail what impacts the subdivision or associated improvements would have on wildlife in the area.
- Describe the effect that pets or human activity would have on wildlife.
- Describe what impacts the subdivision or associated improvements would have on wildlife areas such as big game wintering range, migration routes, nesting areas, wetlands, or important habitat for rare or endangered species.
- Describe the effect that pets or human activity would have on wildlife habitat.

## COMMUNITY IMPACTS

Provide estimates and describe impacts to the following, as a result of the subdivision:

- Education and Busing
- Roads and Maintenance
- Water, Sewage, and Solid Waste Facilities
- Fire and Police Protection
- Payment for Extension of Capital Facilities

## PUBLIC HEARING PROCEDURE-SUBDIVISIONS

The Madison County Planning Board and County Commission both conduct their meetings open to the public following the public notice requirements as prescribed by State statute. Major subdivisions and those minor subdivisions treated as major subdivisions are subject to public hearings by both the Board and Commission.

The Madison County Planning Board shall provide public notice of proposed subdivisions following the notice requirements as prescribed by State statute. Public hearings are required for major subdivisions and subsequent minor subdivisions. Hearings are not permitted for first minor subdivisions.

# SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS AND REVIEW

Public hearings held by the Planning Board shall use the following format:

1. The Planning Board President opens the hearing. The planning staff will present a report that provides background information and describes the key technical points of the application and the proposal's relationship to any land use regulations and the Growth Policy, and the draft Findings of Fact.
2. The subdivider or representative may present information and testimony relating to the proposed subdivision. Planning Board members are permitted to direct any relevant questions to staff or the applicant.
3. Any written comments submitted prior to the hearing will be noted and made available to the public upon request. The President may read correspondence aloud. If the President deems that the written comments are numerous or voluminous, he/she may request that the written comments be summarized.
4. Members of the audience will be given an opportunity to comment on the application or proposal. Comments should be factual and relevant to the proposal. Each person speaking must give his or her name, address, and nature of interest in the matter.
5. After public comment is complete, the subdivider or representative may provide a concise response.
6. Planning Board members may voice other considerations and may pose any relevant questions through the President.
7. The President closes the hearing on the subdivision proposal.
8. The Planning Board will then deliberate the Findings of Fact and Conditions outlined in the staff report, the subdivision application and preliminary plat, the environmental assessment, the summary of probable impacts and proposed mitigation, the adopted Growth Policy, information provided at the public hearing(s), and any additional information authorized by law, then vote to make a recommendation to the County Commission for approval as proposed, approval with conditions, or denial.
9. The County Commission will hold a second public hearing to review the Madison County Planning Board's recommendation, in addition to water, sanitation and all other relevant information, and render a decision for approval, conditional approval, or denial of the proposed subdivision.

## INTERJURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION

Cooperation and communication among county, state, federal, and municipal officials regarding land planning is a critical factor for a successful community. Madison County encompasses a variety of values, needs, and landscapes. While the Growth Policy can serve as a guide for future growth and planning, other specific planning documents function as tools for implementation. The incorporated communities of Twin Bridges, Sheridan, Virginia City and Ennis each have adopted a Growth Policy and other planning documents and regulations, which should be consulted in matters where interjurisdictional interests are at stake. The Action Plan outlined in this document aims to maintain and build relationships with other agencies and officials.

# SOURCES

## *Introduction*

1. Madison County
2. Town of Twin Bridges
3. Town of Sheridan
4. Town of Virginia City
5. Town of Ennis
6. United State Census Bureau

## *Population Characteristics and Economy*

1. Madison County
2. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2022
3. United States Census Bureau
4. Montana Department of Revenue
5. Madison County Audit Report 2023

## *Housing*

1. American Community Survey, Census Bureau
2. Montana Department of Revenue
3. Madison County Housing Needs Assessment 2023

## *Land Use*

1. Madison County
2. Town of Twin Bridges
3. Town of Sheridan
4. Town of Virginia City
5. Town of Ennis
6. Big Sky Resort Area District
7. Montana State Library
8. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
9. United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service
10. United States Forest Service

## *Local Services*

1. Headwaters Economics, Economic Profiling System, 2022
2. Ruby Valley Chamber of Commerce
3. Madison Valley Chamber of Commerce
4. Big Sky Chamber of Commerce
5. Madison County

## *Public Facilities and Infrastructure*

1. American Community Survey, Census Bureau
2. Madison County
3. Madison County Capital Improvements Plan 2016
4. Preliminary Engineering Report for each incorporated community

## *Natural and Cultural Resources*

1. Madison County
2. Montana Department of Environmental Quality
3. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
4. National Weather Service
5. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
6. United States Department of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service
7. Montana Disaster and Emergency Services

