

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Growth Policy Update

<<>>
2024
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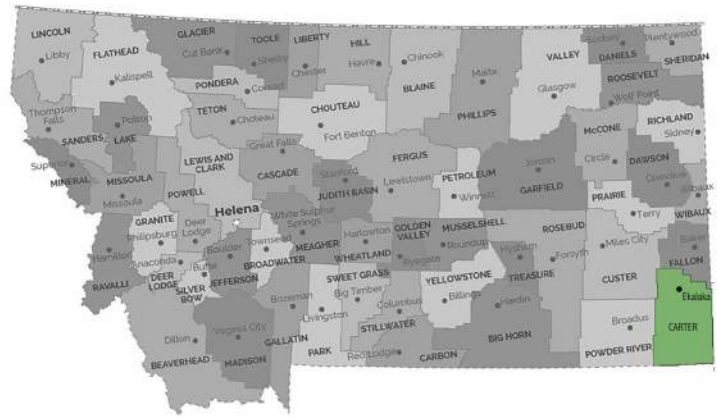
1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE >>

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

The 2024 Carter County Growth Policy is a document that provides a vision for the County indicating how it wants to develop and make public investments over the next 20 years. It provides the long-range focus to help decision-makers set priorities and evaluate whether development proposals are consistent with this vision. It is a tool to coordinate with other government agencies and to communicate to citizens and developers the vision of the community. The Policy provides the framework for regulatory updates, land use decisions, and public investments and will be an invaluable resource for the County.

The Carter County Growth Policy is the responsibility of the Carter County Land Planning Board and takes into consideration all areas of the County, including the incorporated Town of Ekalaka and the unincorporated communities of Albion, Alzada, Belltower, Boyes, Capitol, Hammond, Mill Iron, Ridge, and Ridgeway. Carter County's previous Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy was adopted in 2013. The Town of Ekalaka prepared its own amendment to the policy, which was subsequently adopted by both the Town Council and the County Commissioners in 2013.

To address the most critical issues facing the County, now and in the future, the Carter County Board of Commissioners have authorized the Carter County Land Planning Board to develop a County Growth Policy in



accordance with § 76-1-601 through 76-1-606, Montana Code Annotated (MCA). The requirements outlined in these statutes constitute the contents of this Growth Policy.

In May of 2023 the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 382. This bill created the Montana Land Use Planning Act, which requires cities that meet certain population thresholds to utilize the land use plan, map, zoning regulations, and subdivision regulations outlined in the Act. Population thresholds include those counties with population greater than 70,000. It also allows other local governments, such as Carter County, the option to utilize the provisions of the Act, requiring public participation during the development, adoption, or amendment of a land use plan, map, zoning regulation, or subdivision regulation. The Act also offers strategies to meet population projections. Consideration of factors such as housing, local facilities, economic development, natural resources, environment, and natural hazards when developing a land use plan, map, or zoning regulation is also included, as well as a procedure to review subdivisions and approve final plats.

Carter County is updating its Land Use Resource Plan separate from the development of this Growth Policy. Portions of that plan may be noted throughout this policy and once completed, will be attached to this document for reference. It is recommended that the Land Use

Resource Plan Committee ensure there are no conflicts between that document and this Growth Policy.

The Carter County Land Planning Board is responsible for land and resource use planning in Carter County. Members of the planning board include representatives from the incorporated Town of Ekalaka and the unincorporated areas of the county.

The Land Planning Board considers large- and small-scale plans for new development and provides guidelines for the pattern and pace of future development. The board meets on an as-needed basis to review and approve plans and requests related to land and resource development.

Other planning efforts conducted by Carter County include the development of a Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The County Land Planning Board established a public involvement plan for development of the Growth Policy that included a variety of means for public education and input. Each member of the Land Planning Board was responsible for informing their local governments and residents in their representative areas about the development of the Growth Policy.

Additional members of the community, including elected officials, county employees, and representatives from the Conservation District also participated in the Growth Policy planning process. Thank you to the following individuals for your valuable contributions to the Growth Policy effort:

- Pam Castleberry
- Mike Watkins
- Judy Wright
- Melissa Schwede
- Andy Wright
- Sabre Moore
- Nathan Carroll
- Karen Kreitel

- Adam Courtney
- Sharon Carroll
- LLane Carroll
- Cam LaBree
- Robin Markuson Diede
- Travis Loehding
- Amanda Williams
- Doug Bonsell

The public outreach plan included the creation of a project website with links from the Carter County website and other community social media sites. Growth Policy work session dates and times, the community survey, and updated Policy drafts were posted to the site. The website provided contact information for making comments on the progress of the document.

A public meeting was held on July 23, 2023, to educate the public on the Growth Policy development process and allow comment during a visioning process that included opportunity for comment on each element of the planned Growth Policy document. A final public meeting was held on June 3rd, 2024 to take comments on the final draft of the document.



A community survey was also conducted. The survey and results are included in Appendix A. The top three reasons for living in Carter County included lifestyle/quality of life, low population/sense of community, and low crime/community safety. The

majority of respondents were opposed to countywide zoning regulations, but in favor of regulating large scale industries and limiting development to currently populated areas. Housing was identified as a need and both population and economic growth were supported by most respondents. Most of the respondents believe the County is adequately providing local services and maintaining public facilities.

Press releases were used to inform the public about the progress of the document and announce public meeting opportunities.

Montana State University Extension conducted a Reimagining Rural program in early 2024 and the Carter County Museum hosted an in-person gathering for local residents. During the event, the group discussed the ongoing Growth Policy process and attendees were encouraged to take the online survey.

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

- Carter County Conservation District Board
- Carter County Museum
- Reimagining Rural
- Carter County Land Use Resource Plan Committee

DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

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

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

2. COUNTY BACKGROUND >>

Carter County is in the most southeastern corner of Montana, adjacent to the South Dakota and Wyoming borders. Bordering Montana counties include Fallon, Custer, and Powder River. The county has a total area of 3,340.5 square miles (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

The area was originally inhabited by various Native American tribes, including the Sioux, Crow, and Cheyenne. European explorers, such as the Lewis and Clark expedition, passed through the region in the early 19th century. The first permanent settlement in Carter County was established in the 1880s with the arrival of homesteaders. These settlers were primarily ranchers and farmers attracted to the fertile land and abundant grazing opportunities. The county was officially established in 1917 and named after Thomas H. Carter, a prominent Montana senator.

In the early 20th century, the discovery of coal and coal mining became a significant industry in Carter County. Several coal mines were established, bringing an influx of

miners and their families to the region. The town of Ekalaka, the county seat, thrived during this time, with businesses, schools, and other infrastructure developing to support the growing population.

Carter County faced its fair share of challenges over the years, including economic downturns and natural disasters like severe droughts and wildfires. Despite these hardships, the county has persevered and remains an important agricultural center, known for its cattle ranching and wheat farming. Today, Carter County is a close-knit community that values its history and natural resources, with a strong commitment to preserving the area's rural character and proud heritage (Historic.one, 2023).

Ekalaka, the county seat, is the only incorporated community in the county. Other communities that are not incorporated include Albion, Alzada, Belltower, Boyes, Capitol, Hammond, Mill Iron, Ridge, and Ridgeway.

Date	Event
1867	Carter County was established as part of the Dakota Territory.
1881	Early European settlement of the area began with the first trail herd of Texas cattle.
1885	Ekalaka was founded.
1889	Carter County became a part of the new state of Montana.
1900	The first homestead was filed. The greatest number of homesteads were filed during 1910, 1913, and 1914.
1901	Ekalaka was established as the county seat.
1917	Carter County was established by the state legislature.
1936	The Carter County Museum was officially founded and opened to the public in the basement of the first high school.
1950	The first oil well was drilled in Carter County.
1957	Medicine Rocks State Park became an official state park when the County Commissioners deeded the land to the state for that purpose.

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

1961	Coal mining began in the county.
1984	The Ekalaka Public Library was built.
2006	A tornado hit parts of Carter County, causing significant damage.

(Historic.one, 2023)



Ekalaka was established in 1885 by a bison hunter whose wagon became stuck in the snow. He proclaimed, “any place in Montana is a good place for a saloon,” so he unloaded the lumber he had in the wagon and commenced construction. However, the town was not named after him, but rather the wife of one of the

first white settlers in the area, a Sioux woman named Ijkalaka (Graetz, 2023).

Although a saloonkeeper founded Ekalaka, the country grew on cattle. The first herds came through from Texas and Wyoming in the 1870s, and by the 1880s big ranch outfits were in place. The rich grasses of the area supported huge bison herds and later were prized for cattle grazing. Sheep were also a mainstay of the early-day economy. At one time Carter County led Montana in sheep production (Graetz, 2023).

A two-block-long Main Street encompasses, amongst other businesses, a couple of cafes, saloons, motels, and the 5,800-square-foot Carter County Museum, which is the first county museum and the first museum to display fossils in the state of Montana (Sanford, 2023). The prairie stretching from Ekalaka in all directions is some of the most beautiful mixture

of landscapes in Montana east of the mountains. Most prominent are several sections of the far-flung Custer National Forest: the Long Pines, Ekalaka Hills, Chalk Buttes, and Medicine Rocks State Park (Graetz, 2023).

Many legends have been recorded about the area, including the story of Starvation Butte. It is said that a Native American woman climbed it, and as she reached the top, her footing crumbled beneath her. Unable to return, she died of starvation. Fighting Butte was the site of a skirmish in which the Sioux chased a hunting party of Crow Indians to the top. Pushed back to the steep edge of the table of rocks, the Crow were forced to leap to their deaths when the enemy set the top ablaze (Graetz, 2023).

From Miles City, the location of both the nearest interstate highway (I-94) and Walmart, it is approximately 79 miles east and then 36 miles south from Baker to Ekalaka. This is one of the most remote communities in Montana, and among the most remote in the continental United States. The highway down from Baker was the only paved road into town as recently as 2010 (Dietrich, 2021). Since then, State Highway 323 from Alzada to Ekalaka has also been paved.

Population counts, the numbers most often used to measure community vitality, have been in decline for decades in most rural counties in the Great Plains, north central and eastern Montana included. For example, a U.S. Census Bureau study published in 2009 reported that most of Montana’s plains counties had lost at least 10% of their population between 1950 and 2007, mirroring trends in the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, and eastern Colorado (Dietrich, 2021).

For a century, ever since the homestead boom of the early 1900s, that's been the story in Carter County. The decennial census counted 4,136 residents in 1930, but the decades since have delivered steady decline. The county population was down to 3,280 by 1940, then dipped below the 2,000-mark by 1970. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau tallied a population of only 1,160 (Dietrich, 2021).

By the time census takers made their rounds in 2020, though, something appears to have changed. When the Census Bureau published detailed data from the 2020 count in August, it reported the Carter County population at 1,415 – up 255 residents, or 22%, over 2010. On a percentage basis, only one part of Montana, Bozeman's Gallatin County, grew more over the last decade (Dietrich, 2021).

But census counts are not the only vital statistics ticking up in Carter County. K-8 enrollment at the Ekalaka Elementary School was 98 during the 2020-21 school year, according to data from the state Office of Public Instruction, up by 26 from a decade earlier. And then there's Ekalaka's Main Street, which has seen a small-scale resurgence in recent years, much of it led by a new generation of business owners. Counting the bar and coffee shop, the town now has four dining establishments. A spacious new Main Street market, Ijkalaka Grocery, also opened in a newly constructed building in September 2021, filling the gap left after a smaller downtown grocery burned down in 2018 (Dietrich, 2021).

The Carter County Museum plays a key role in preserving and showcasing the unique cultural and natural heritage of the region, providing educational opportunities,



and driving economic development through tourism (Sanford, 2023).

There is a Mayberry aspect to Ekalaka's small-town appeal – the sense that its isolation makes it a safe, comfortable place to lead a quiet life focused on family. In his article, "Growing Home in Ekalaka," Eric Dietrich quoted Carter County Treasurer, Jesi Pierson, as saying her favorite thing about the community was the sort of childhood it let her give her four kids, the oldest of whom was 12 at the time. She said it was a place where kids could ride bikes unattended or walk themselves home from school. If one of them went missing after class, she could call their teacher, who would likely know which friend they took off with and which direction they went. "I'm not worried about traffic or kidnappers," Pierson said. "The most dangerous things around here are sharp sticks and snakes (Dietrich, 2021)."

3. POPULATION >>

3.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

Carter County’s total population, according to Headwaters Economics’ Economic Profile System, was estimated at 1,349 in 2021. Between 2010 and 2021, the county’s population increased by 60 people or approximately 4.7% (Headwaters Economics, 2023). Population totals for Carter County and the Town of Ekalaka are shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Carter County and Town of Ekalaka Populations (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

	2000	2010	2011	2020	2021	2022
Town of Ekalaka	394	330	324*	399	405**	397
Carter County	1,335	1,159	1,136*	1,408	1,410**	1,352

*lowest population between 2000 and 2022
 **highest population between 2000 and 2022

Carter County and the Town of Ekalaka experienced a decline after 2000, but both populations rose during the COVID-19 pandemic that was at its peak in 2020 and 2021. Telecommuters, retirees, and previous residents of rural communities were known to find refuge in small communities to escape the more highly populated and restricted areas of the country.

The Headwaters Economics’ Demographic Profile of the county indicates the median age in Carter County increased 10.2% between 2010 and 2021 (see Table 3.2). Comparatively, the median age in the United States increased by 4.1% from 36.9 years to 38.4 years during the same time period.

Table 3.2 Profile of Median Age in 2021 (Headwaters Economics, 2023)

	Median Age 2021/2010	Under 18	18-34	35-44	45-64	65+
Carter County	56.2/51.0	17.5%	15.9%	7.6%	30.3%	28.7%

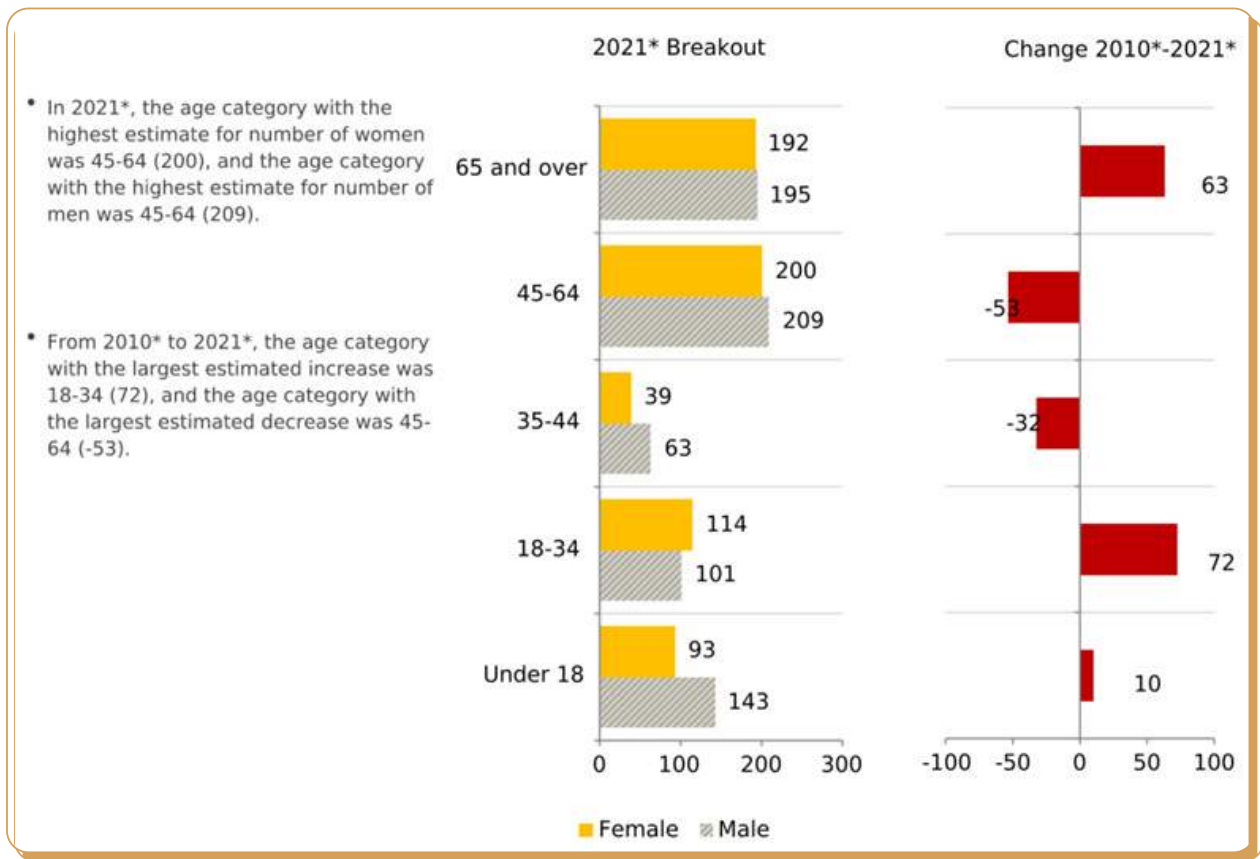
The profile estimates that there are 673 civilian employees in Carter County who are greater than 16 years of age. The median household income in Carter County in 2021 was \$41,447, compared to \$69,021 for that of the United States.

Information from the U.S. Census Bureau regarding income and poverty for Carter County, Montana, and the United States is listed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Income and Poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

	Carter County	Montana	United States
Median Household Income (in 2022 dollars)	\$46,486	\$66,341	\$75,149
Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months (in 2022 dollars)	\$28,824	\$37,837	\$41,261
Persons in Poverty (percent)	13.2%	12.1%	11.5%

Figure 3.1 Headwaters Economics' Demographic Profile of Median Age by Gender in Carter County (Headwaters Economics, 2023)



Carter County’s population reflects limited racial diversity. According to the 2020 Census, 96.1% of the population is white and 94.9% is not Hispanic or Latino. These numbers are somewhat higher than the statewide average of 88.7% and 85.3%, respectively.

Table 3.4 Race and Hispanic Origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)

	Carter County	Montana	United States
White alone	96.1%	88.7%	75.5%
Black or African American alone	0.4%	0.6%	13.6%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	0.9%	6.5%	1.3%
Asian alone	0.1%	1.1%	6.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%
Two or More Races	2.6%	3.0%	3.0%
Hispanic or Latino	1.3%	4.5%	19.1%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	94.9%	85.3%	58.9%

3.2. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

The Montana Census and Economic Information Center (CEIC) projects that Carter County's population will increase steadily until it reaches its peak in 2030, at which time it will begin decreasing until at least 2040.

Table 3.5 Carter County Projected Population (Montana Department of Commerce, 2023)

Year	2020	2025	2030	2035	2040
Population	1,413	1,448	1,461	1,429	1,365

Factors leading to a population decline in the county may be related to a general decline in the birth rate as parents are choosing to have smaller families. Residents may also be choosing to relocate to larger communities with more cultural, economic, or educational opportunities.

The 20-year trend from 2020 to 2040 shows the largest growth in the age groups 50-54 and 80-84 years with a decrease in those 30-34 and 65-69 years (see Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Implications for such trends include a need for affordable housing, healthcare, and recreational opportunities.

Figure 3.2 State of Montana and Carter County Age Pyramid 2020 (Montana Department of Commerce, 2023)

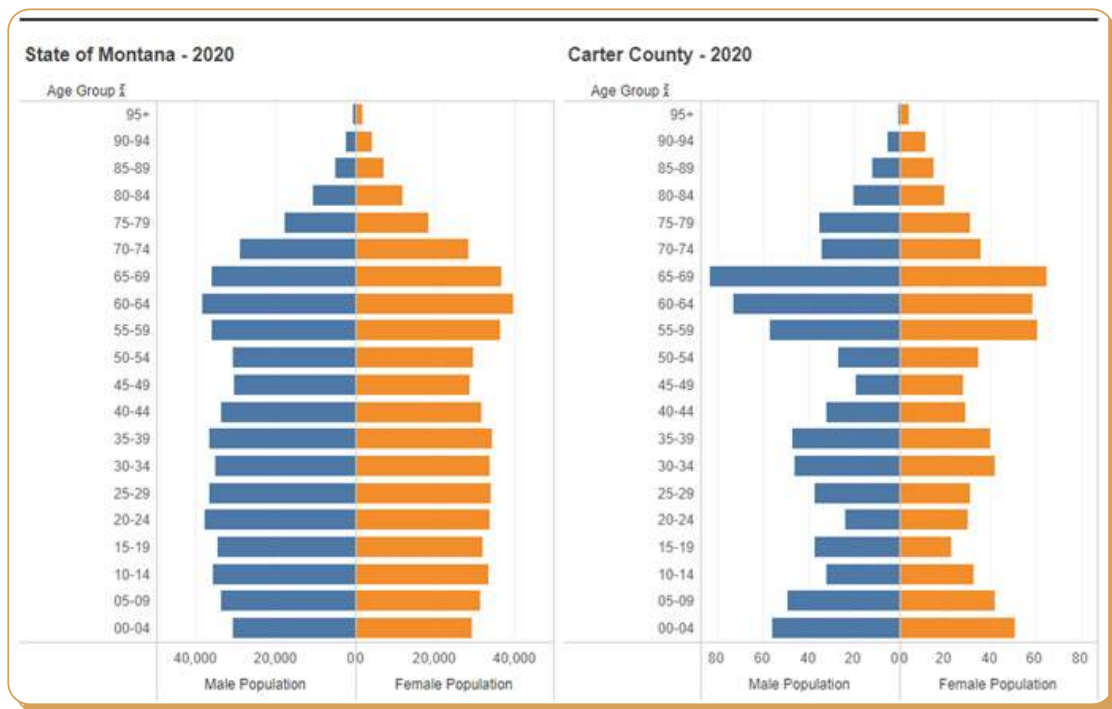
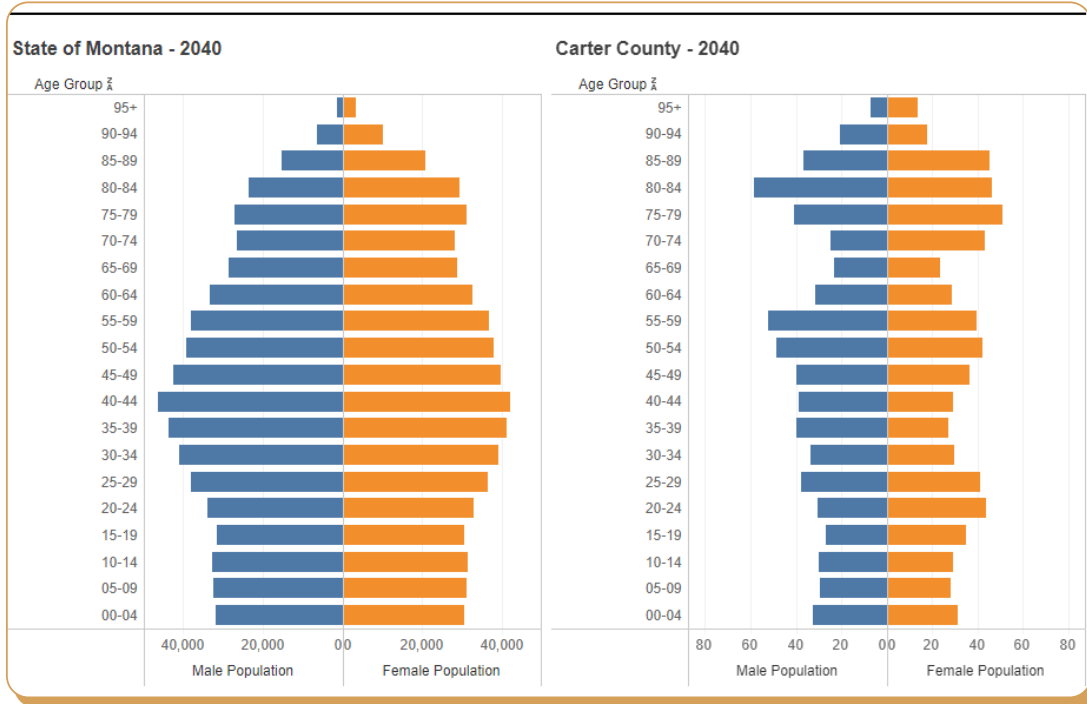


Figure 3.3 State of Montana and Carter County Age Pyramid 2040
(Montana Department of Commerce, 2023)



3.3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 3.1

Sustainable population growth that maintains a rural lifestyle with growth that produces stable, vital communities.

Objectives

Plan for 1% to 2% annual growth (about 14–30 people per year based on future trends).

Actions

Utilize the Chamber of Commerce and Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) to market quality of life factors that attract new residents.

Support local government efforts such as addressing blight or other public safety issues to build community values that will attract engaged community members.

GOAL 3.2

Identify areas in Carter County that are desirable for growth and target capital improvements for these areas.

Objectives	Actions
Encourage in-fill developments in and near town centers to prevent urban sprawl and preserve open space and agricultural land.	Ekalaka to utilize subdivision and zoning regulations to encourage in-fill developments.
	Towns and populated unincorporated areas seek to provide adequate infrastructure (water, sewer, storm) in areas suitable for growth. This may include acquisition of funding for projects. Common sources for infrastructure funding include the Montana Department of Commerce, DNRC, and USDA Rural Development.

GOAL 3.3

Provide the means to maintain the current population and attract new residents who represent the future of the community.

Objectives	Actions
Maintain and improve infrastructure and services that support older adults or retirees and allow them to remain in the community.	Support housing development and upgrades that provide accessible and attractive housing options for seniors utilizing funding from sources that may include CDBG, HOME, or Rural Development.
	Work with EPEDC to encourage business and services for older adults (i.e., healthcare and social centers). Utilize funding from sources that may include CDBG and Rural Development.
Maintain and improve infrastructure and services that support maternal, family, and children’s services.	Support housing development and upgrades that provide affordable housing options utilizing funding from sources that may include CDBG, HOME, or Rural Development.
	Work with EPEDC to encourage business and services for families (i.e., healthcare, schools, childcare centers, and recreational facilities). Utilize funding from sources that may include CDBG and Rural Development.
	Local government to actively engage young adults in community leadership positions.
	Local government to work with local agencies (youth groups, schools, museum, and library) to promote activities, educational programs, and entertainment for youth.
Design facilities and services to accommodate people of all ages and abilities.	Local government to ensure ADA access to facilities and services, including seeking funding from programs that assist with accessibility (MDT TA, CDBG, Housing Rehab, or CDBG Public Facilities).

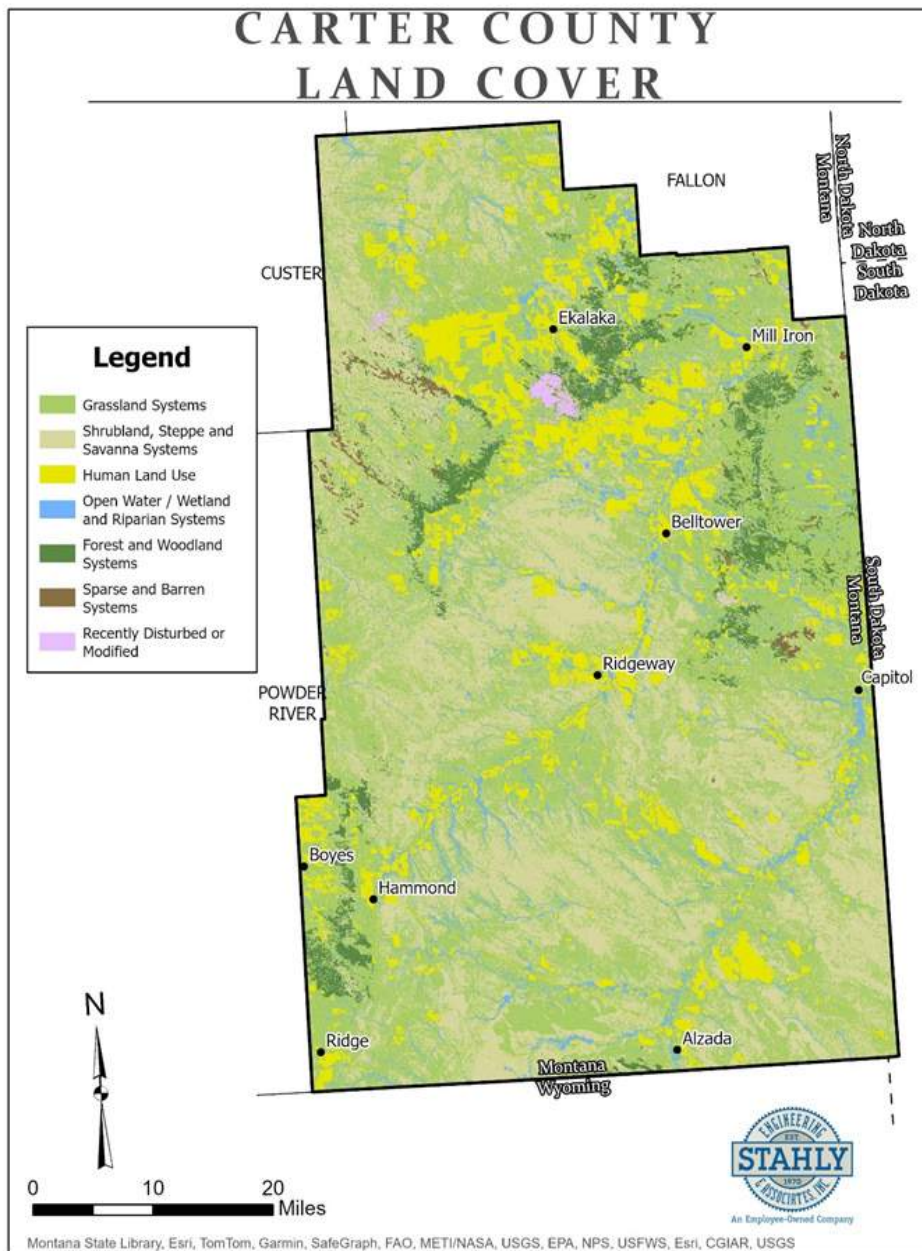
4. LAND USE >>

4.1. LAND DESCRIPTION

Carter County has 3,340.5 square miles of land area and is the 15th largest county in Montana by total area. It is located in the most southeastern corner of the state. The county is bound by the state of South Dakota to the east and the state of Wyoming to the south. The region is characterized by rugged pine forested hills, rolling grasslands, and hardwood draws. All water flows north into the Yellowstone or Missouri River systems.

Woodland and forest trees are predominantly Ponderosa Pine, with a number of different hardwoods in the creeks and draws throughout the county. Medicine Rocks State Park, located 14 miles north of Ekalaka, consists of 330 acres of sandstone formations created from wind erosion (Carter County Resource Use Plan, 2006).

Figure 4.1 Carter County Land Cover (Natural Heritage Map Viewer, 2024)



4.2. LAND USE

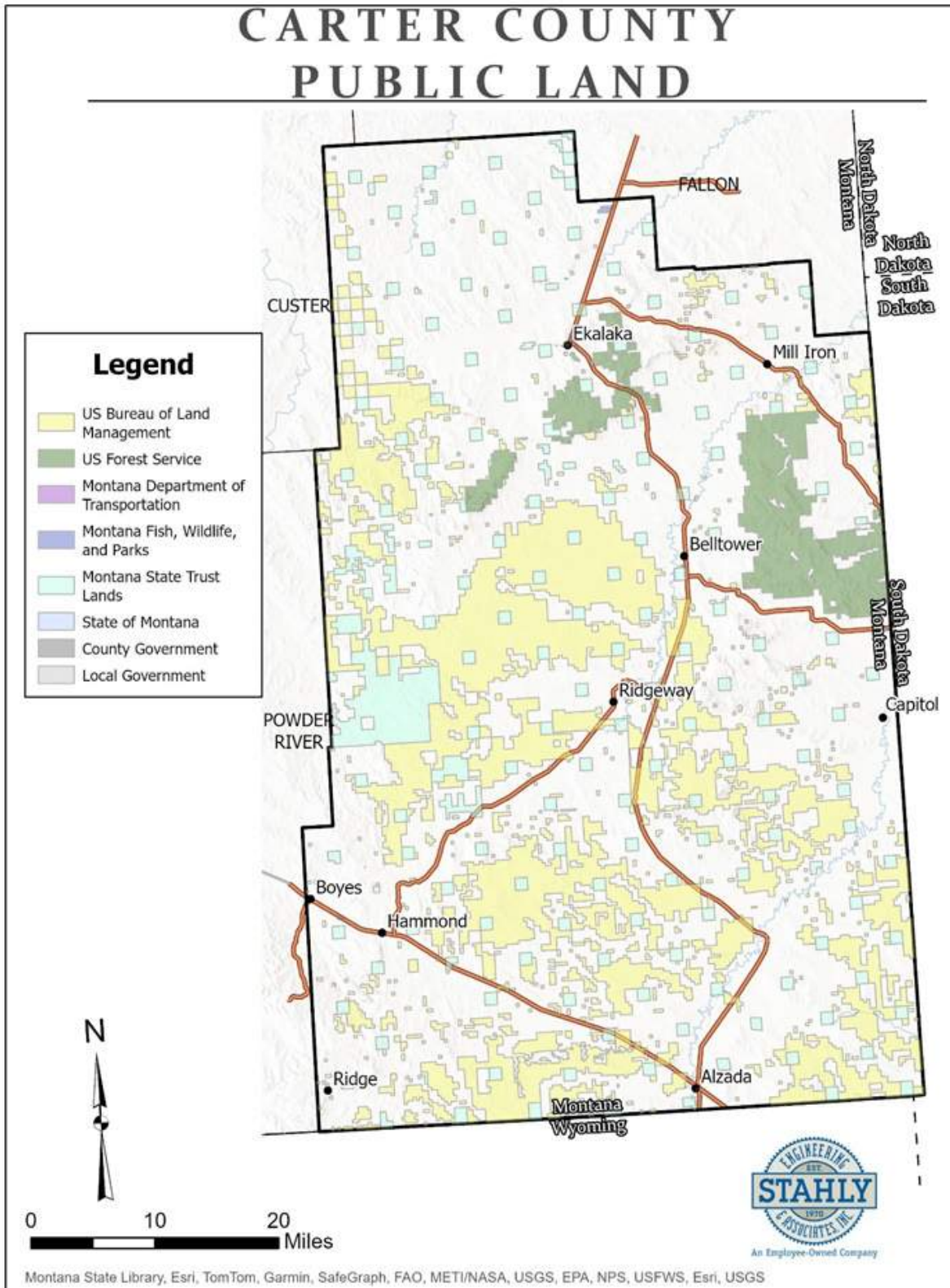
Carter County contains approximately 2,141,719 acres, with 65% privately owned and 35% owned by a Federal, State, County, or Local Government agencies, as seen in the Table 4.1 below (Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024).

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is responsible for 24% of the federal lands in Carter County, while the U.S. Forest Service is responsible for the remaining 4% of federal lands. The Montana State Trust owns 7% of the land in Carter County. Medicine Rocks State Park is owned and managed by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. Local government owns less than 1% of the land in Carter County.

Table 4.1 Carter County Land Ownership (Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024)

Location	Acres	Percentage of Total
Carter County	2,141,719	100%
Private Lands	1,384,746	65%
Federal Lands	595,032	28%
U.S. Bureau of Land Management	504,520	24%
U.S. Forest Service	90,512	4%
State Lands	144,502	7%
State Trust Lands	144,492	7%
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks	10	<1%
Local Government	564	<1%
Reservation Boundaries	521	<1%
Conservation Easements	16,354	1%

Figure 4.2 Carter County Public Land Ownership (Natural Heritage Map Viewer, 2024)



Conservation easements make up 1% of the land within Carter County. Conservation easements can be held by private or public entities, such as the ones listed in Table 4.2. Lands placed into conservation easements allow the current landowner to maintain ownership although the land is managed with a focus on conservation of agricultural and wildlife habitat. These conservation easements are a way to prevent land from certain types of development and are perpetual with the land.

Table 4.2 Carter County Conservation Easements (Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024)

Location	Acres
Conservation Easements	16,354
Private	5,447
Montana Land Reliance	2,261
The Nature Conservancy	3,186
State and Local	10,907
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks	10,891
Montana Department of Transportation	16

As of 2022, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Census of Agriculture, a total of 1,682,561 acres, or 78.6%, of the land in Carter County is used for agricultural purposes (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022). Approximately 13% of agricultural land is used for cropland, such as hay, wheat, and dry edible peas, and 86% of agricultural land is pastureland for livestock, mostly cattle and sheep. The number of farms declined from 2012 to 2022, but the average size increased, as seen in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Carter County Agricultural Profile (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022)

	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
Number of Farms	289	308	327	323	282
Average Size (acres)	5,768	5,514	5,437	5,473	5,967
Total Land in Farms (acres)	1,666,922	1,698,383	1,778,011	1,767,723	1,682,561

Ekalaka is the only incorporated area in Carter County. Figure 4.3 illustrates the type of land ownership within the town limits of Ekalaka. Figure 4.4 depicts property types throughout Ekalaka.

When the Town of Ekalaka adopted its amendment to the previous Carter County Growth Policy in 2013, it was noted that the Town could annex land adjacent to its current boundaries, if developed, to accommodate an influx of people into the area, thus increasing the population and its tax base (Town of Ekalaka, 2013).

Figure 4.3 Land Ownership in Ekalaka (Montana State Library GIS Clearinghouse, 2024)

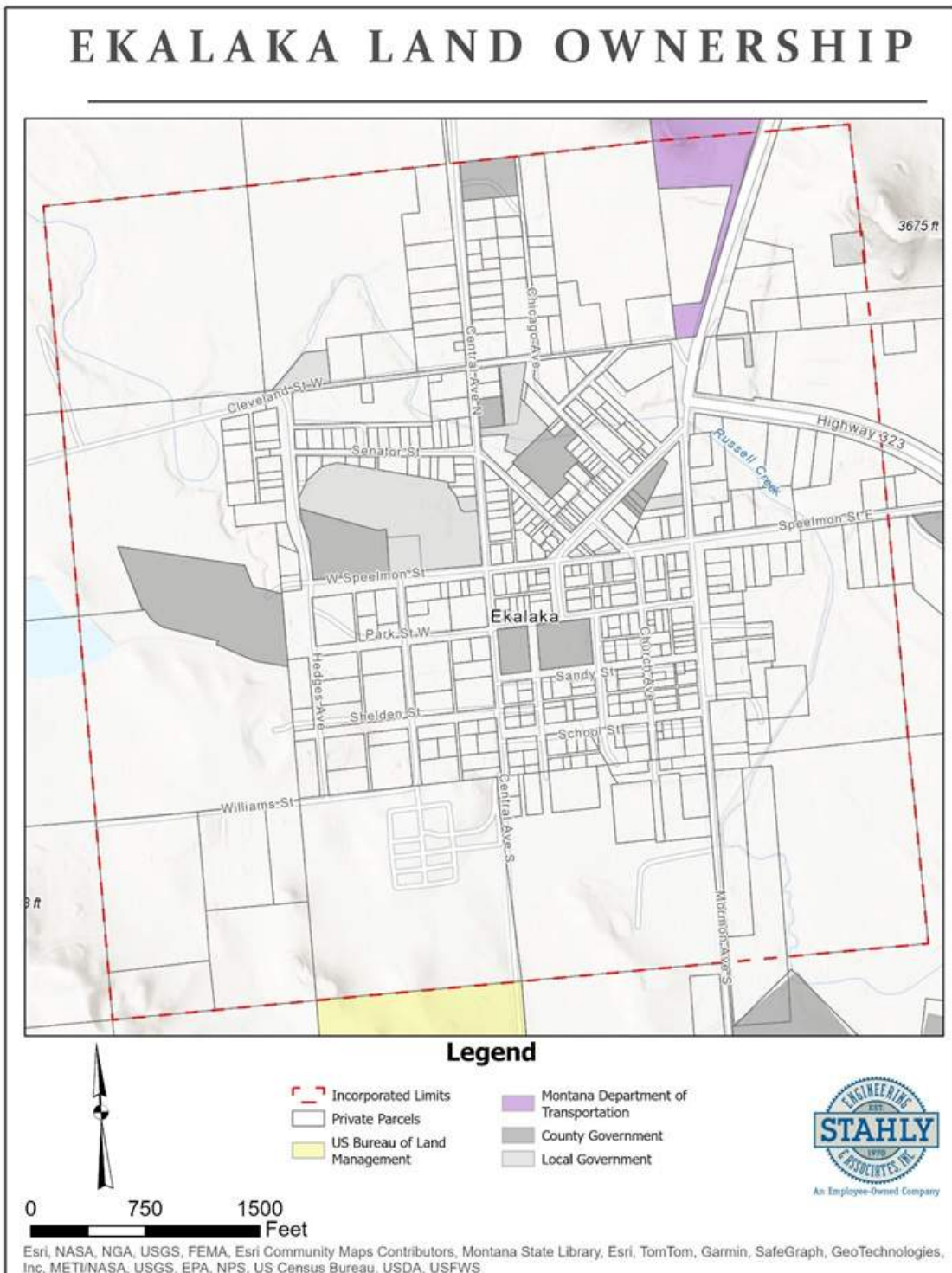
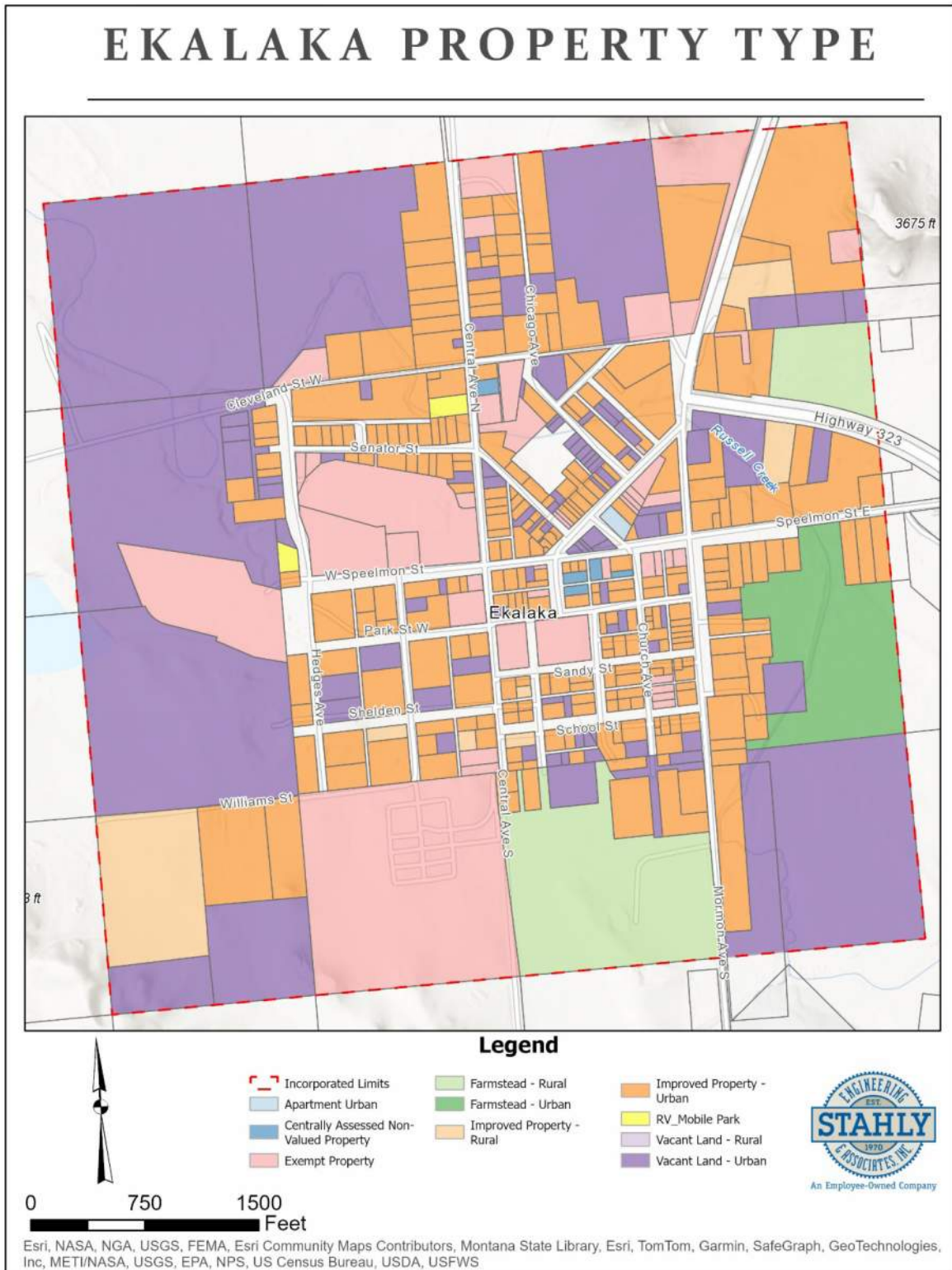


Figure 4.4 Property Type in Ekalaka (Montana State Library GIS Clearinghouse, 2024)



Property type is a classification used by Montana’s Department of Revenue to determine the type of property for tax purposes. This classification was used to display land use patterns within the incorporated area of Carter County, shown in Figure 4.4. The most predominant property types found within the incorporated area are Vacant Land – Urban, Improved Property – Urban, and Exempt Property.

Ekalaka is the largest community in Carter County at approximately 659 acres. Based on Montana Cadastral Owner Parcels data, 36% of the land area in Ekalaka is classified as Vacant Land.

Table 4.4 Property Type in Ekalaka

Property Type	Acres	Percent
Apartment Urban	0.51	0.08%
Centrally Assessed Non-Valued Property	1.23	0.19%
Exempt Property	96.31	14.61%
Farmstead – Rural	39.11	5.93%
Farmstead – Urban	22.48	3.41%
Improved Property – Rural	20.96	3.18%
Improved Property – Urban	171.93	26.08%
RV Mobile Park	1.28	0.19%
Vacant Land – Rural	0.00	0.00%
Vacant Land – Urban	237.92	36.09%
TOTAL	659.24	100.00%

The County’s Resource Use Plan was completed in 2006 and does not include any subdivision regulations. The Resource Use Plan is currently being updated. Carter County does have subdivision regulations in place, which are in the process of being updated following legislative changes made in 2022.

The use of Exempt subdivisions allows land to remain in agricultural production while creating a parcel of land for housing. It is anticipated, as shown in Table 4.5, that future land use will include the steady use of Exempt subdivisions.

Table 4.5 Carter County Subdivision Activity

Year	Minor	Major	Exempt	Total
2016			3	3
2017	1		1	2
2018			1	1
2019			4	4
2020	1		8	9
2021			2	2
2022			5	5
2023			2	

It is no surprise the Exempt subdivision is the most common subdivision in Carter County, as it is typically the most common subdivision found in rural counties in Montana. Exempt subdivisions include family member transfers, agricultural purposes, and common boundary relocation. Table 4.5 also shows the few land developments which have occurred in the last eight years with a total of two minor and zero major subdivisions. Minor subdivisions can create five or fewer parcels of land, whereas a major subdivision can create six or more parcels of land. Exempt subdivisions are a division of land which is exempt from local government review.

4.3. POLICY, REGULATORY, AND FINANCIAL ITEMS

The County's Growth Policy and Resource Use Plan are primary tools employed to guide the use of lands and resources while protecting the rights of private landowners in Carter County. Because 35% of lands in the county are Federal or State Lands, the Growth Policy is a major instrument for Carter County to coordinate land management activities conducted by federal or state agencies. Cooperative relationships and communication exist between the agencies and the county.

The subdivision review process is a policy to promote development and protect public health and safety. It does not regulate the location or type of land use development. There are a variety of additional tools that can be used by the County and incorporated town of Ekalaka to implement land use goals and objectives. Not all land use policies, and regulatory tools are appropriate for rural Montana communities and, therefore, local governments must carefully consider the use of each of these in their deliberations regarding land use decisions.

- **Policies** that can be used to implement future land use goals and objectives are:
 - » Land Use Policy
 - » Long range planning
 - » Targeted Economic Development Districts (TED)
 - » Prime farmland/agricultural preservation
- **Regulatory tools** that can be used to implement and enforce future land use goals and objectives are:
 - » Subdivision regulations, including design standards
 - » Zoning regulations
 - » Conservation Easements
 - » Floodplain regulations
 - » Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations
- **Financial items** that can be used to implement future land use goals and objectives are:
 - » Grants
 - » Taxation changes
 - » Land acquisition
 - » Capital Improvement Plans
 - » Targeted Economic Development Districts (TED)
 - » Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts
 - » Education towards and development of more valuable commodities that thereby make ranches/farms more profitable

4.4. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

It is anticipated that 65% of the land in Carter County will continue to be privately owned, while the remaining 35% continues to be owned and managed by various governmental agencies. As a result, continued cooperation and communication between Carter County officials and both private and governmental landowners will be critical to guiding development in a manner that is consistent with the values of Carter County residents.

4.5. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 4.1	
Protect the natural environment/heritage of Carter County as growth occurs.	
Objectives	Actions
Allow development that is compatible with the natural heritage of the area and supports and protects the natural resources, ecosystem, and recreational opportunities in the county/town.	Local government and other stakeholders, including potential developers, actively participate in planning efforts by state/federal agencies (BLM, FWP, or USFS).
	Local government and planning boards consult with the public, non-profit and resource management agencies within the area of proposed development early in review stages.
Encourage the enhancement of public spaces within Carter County and its communities.	Local government actively encourages state and federal agencies to invest in the enhancement of public spaces.
	Local government seeks resources and funding to build or improve recreational opportunities within the county, such as hiking trails, ATV trails, shooting ranges, etc.

GOAL 4.2

Preserve agricultural land and promote an environment for successful agricultural operations.

Objectives	Actions
<p>Encourage development in areas that are not in agricultural production.</p>	<p>Local government to utilize right-to-farm protections in Montana Code.</p>
	<p>MCA 76-2-901. Agricultural activities -- legislative finding and purpose. (1) The legislature finds that agricultural lands and the ability and right of farmers and ranchers to produce a safe, abundant, and secure food and fiber supply have been the basis of economic growth and development of all sectors of Montana's economy. In order to sustain Montana's valuable farm economy and land bases associated with it, farmers and ranchers must be encouraged and have the right to stay in farming. (2) It is therefore the intent of the legislature to protect agricultural activities from governmental zoning and nuisance ordinances.</p>
	<p>Identify productive agricultural lands and target for agricultural preservation programs.</p>
	<p>Coordinate with state and federal agencies to promote sustainable agricultural practices.</p>
	<p>Provide information regarding conservation easements and other incentives to preserve agricultural land. Encourage activities that meet this goal.</p>
	<p>Local government to coordinate land use policies and infrastructure development to preserve water resources used by agricultural, recreational, municipal, and other beneficial users.</p>

GOAL 4.3

Ensure development that is compatible with existing land uses, protects small town character, and minimizes negative impacts.

Objectives

Establish or maintain policies and regulations that promote compatibility with existing land uses, protect small town character, and minimize negative impacts.

Actions

Local government to review development standards to determine if they are adequate to meet health and safety concerns.

Local government to identify areas that are most appropriate for growth within the unincorporated portions of the growth policy planning area.

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

Local government to work with state agencies and landowners to identify Brownfields sites and provide education on programs to clean-up contaminated properties.

Maintain updated subdivision regulations to reflect changes in state requirements or land use patterns.

Maintain state mandated Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations.

5. HOUSING >>

5.1. CURRENT CHARACTERISTICS AND CONDITIONS

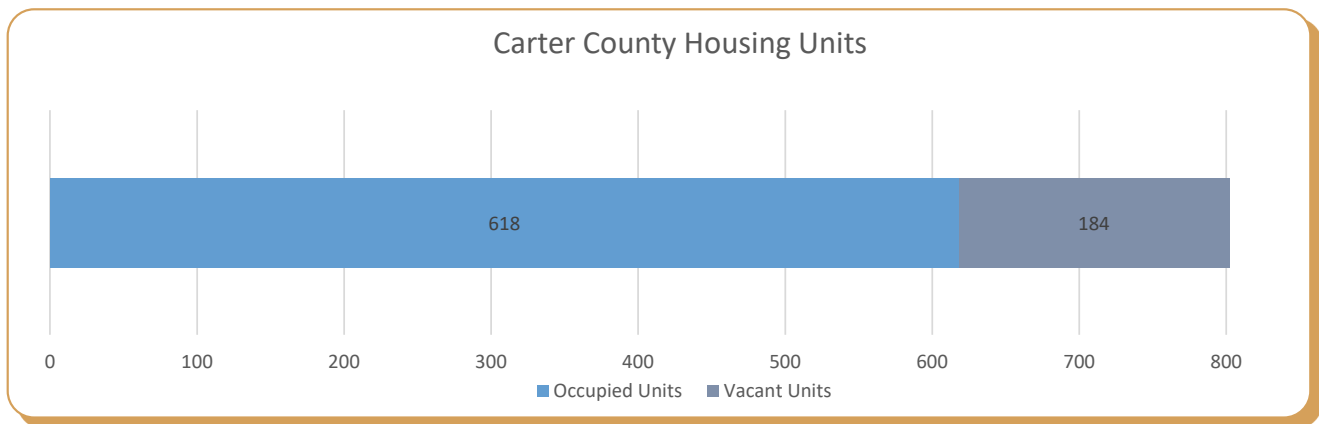
In 2001, the Town of Ekalaka prepared a housing plan that included a windshield survey of all housing units in town. The survey determined that 35% of the houses were severely substandard. As a result, in 2002 the Town was able to obtain funding from the Montana Department of Commerce Community Development Block Grant to rehabilitate over 30 homes and demolish over 50 blighted structures (Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy, 2018).

According to 2021 information provided by Headwaters Economics, 41.3% of the housing stock in Carter County was built prior to 1979, which is just slightly above the national average of 39.9% (Headwaters Economics, 2023).

Carter County has a total of 823 housing units serving 598 households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). Information from the 2018–2022 American Community Survey indicates that Carter County has a 63.5% homeownership rate, which is below the average homeownership rate for the state of Montana at 69.0% and the United States at 64.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

Figure 5.1 illustrates the total number of occupied and vacant housing units in Carter County as of 2021 (Headwaters Economics, 2023).

Figure 5.1 Home Ownership in Carter County (Headwaters Economics, 2023)



Housing affordability is generally measured by the ratio of homeowner costs to total household income. Housing is considered to be affordable if homeowner costs, which include mortgage payments, real estate taxes, utilities, insurance, and various other fees, are less than 30% of the total household income. Affordable housing is often in the form of multi-family properties, and Carter County has 31 properties with two or more units (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). As shown in Table 5.1, 37.8% of households in Carter County are paying more than 30% of their total household income towards a mortgage, and 58.1% are paying more than 30% of their total household income towards rent. Both percentages are higher than the statewide and national averages.

Table 5.1 Housing Affordability (2022: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024)

Percent of Households with Housing Costs Greater than 30% of Total Household Income			
	Carter County	Montana	United States
Mortgage Costs	37.8%	28.9%	27.9%
Rent	58.1%	44.6%	51.9%

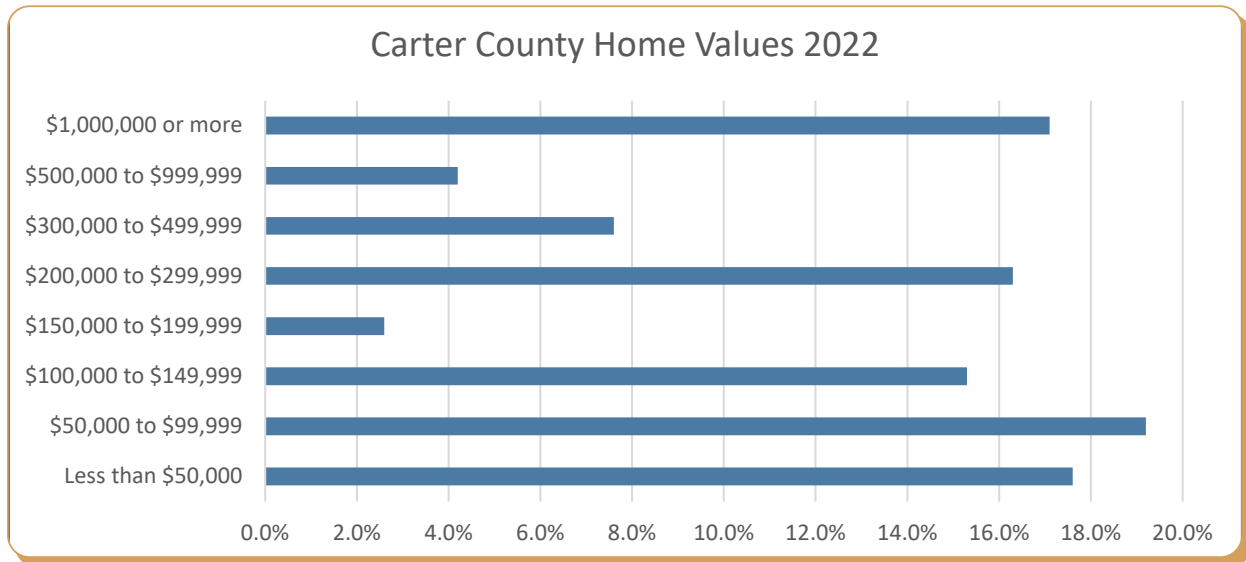
Housing Choice Vouchers, which are distributed through the Montana Department of Commerce Housing Division, allow low-income families to pay no more than 30% of their income in rent, and disperses the remaining rent directly to the landlord. Subsidized housing in Carter County is listed in Table 5.2. Carter Manor offers both subsidized and non-subsidized housing.

Table 5.2 Subsidized Housing in Carter County

Location	Name	Type/Description	Number of Units
Ekalaka	Carter Manor	One-bedroom apartments	12

Home values in Carter County have been steadily increasing since 2010, when the median value of a home was \$66,200. Based on 2020 Census Data, the median home price in Carter County was approximately \$109,400 while 2022 estimates indicate the median home price increased to \$140,900 (2022: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024). Just over half (54.7%) of the homes in Carter County are valued at less than \$200,000.

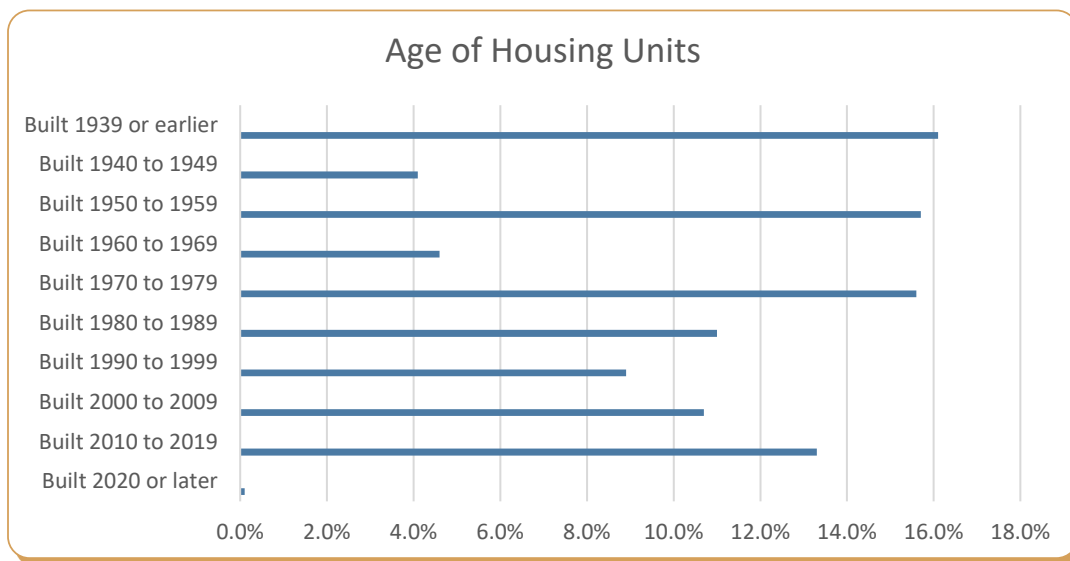
Figure 5.2 Carter County Home Values (2022: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024)



**This data is based on 380 owner occupied units.*

The majority of Carter County is rural in nature, and in general, is comprised of older housing which does not provide the same investment value as housing in larger cities and towns. Approximately 36% of the homes in Carter County were constructed prior to 1960 and may be in need of repairs or improvements based on their age if they were not part of the 2002 CDBG rehabilitation project (2022: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024). In addition, homes in rural communities often need rehabilitation and retrofitting for energy efficiency.

Figure 5.3 Age of Housing Units (2022: ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024)



Carter County has had its housing challenges. For example, finding and keeping teachers is a consistent challenge for the Ekalaka school district. In part because Ekalaka’s housing market is so small. It can be particularly difficult to find rentals for first-year teachers and other new arrivals. According to Ekalaka School District business manager Lora Tauck, in at least one case a new teacher has accepted a job in Ekalaka and subsequently backed out after being unable to find housing (Dietrich, 2021).

5.2. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

Another housing challenge facing residents of Carter County involves land ownership. Due to skewed property lines in Ekalaka, title insurance is not available on these properties. The Town of Ekalaka is researching funding options to have the land re-surveyed to address this issue. Cooperation and assistance from the County may be necessary to reach a resolution.

Carter County is expected to experience a slow and steady increase in population through the year 2030, at which time it is expected that the population will begin to steadily decrease through at least 2040 (see Table 3.5). The 20-year trend from 2020 to 2040 shows the largest growth in the age groups 50-54 and 80-84 years with a decrease in those 30-34 and 65-69 years. Such trends indicate a need for affordable housing, healthcare, and recreational opportunities. Additionally, housing that supports the needs of seniors will continue to be in demand. Services that support the health and well-being of this age group will also be needed. This includes medical and emergency services, fire protection, and law enforcement.

Housing resources that would be available to the residents of Carter County include:

- **MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE (MDOC):**
 - » Federal Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) managed by MDOC
 - » CDBG Large-Scale Multi-Family Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants
 - » CDBG Small-Scale Single-Family Housing Rehabilitation Grants
- **HOME GRANTS** – provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and MDOC
 - » Homebuyer Assistance
 - » Affordable Housing Development and Rehabilitation Grants

- **HOUSING TRUST FUND** – construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable rental housing for extremely low-income families
- **USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT**
 - » Housing Repair Loans and Grants
 - » Community Facilities Direct Loans and Grants – multi-family and single-family housing programs
- **ACTION FOR EASTERN MONTANA, MONTANA HOUSING DIVISION, AND NEIGHBOR WORKS MONTANA**

5.3. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 5.1	
Meet housing needs for all ages, incomes, and special needs groups.	
Objectives	Actions
Expand housing stock to meet the need for Low to Moderate Income (LMI) families and first-time homebuyers.	Utilize housing organizations to seek resources to improve housing quality, condition, and availability and support efforts to build affordable homes and rentals, including single family homes.
	Local government to support housing developers with access to grant and loan funding for multi-family and single-family housing.
	Local government/planning board to review regulations to eliminate barriers to multi-family or affordable housing options.
Encourage development/improvement of affordable homes and rentals to meet the needs of a growing workforce, including single family homes.	Conduct a housing needs assessment in Carter County and determine potential for rehabilitation grants.
Develop a variety of housing types to meet the needs of the changing population.	Promote and encourage the use of commercial and residential structures, including historic preservation of buildings, to develop rental units in currently unused spaces (i.e., above businesses, within unused government facilities).
	Local government to exercise policies to promote development of multi-family rental units in incorporated area where infrastructure and services are readily available.
	Target expansion and development of housing for seniors, such as assisted living centers and active retirement communities.
	Support land use policies that will encourage redevelopment of land for housing purposes.
Affordable housing for all populations.	Support grant and loan applications for the rehabilitation of existing housing designated for LMI and senior residents. Work with housing agencies and lenders to promote programs for home improvement and rehabilitation.

6. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT >>

6.1. EMPLOYMENT

The remoteness of Carter County and the Town of Ekalaka, limit employment opportunities, and limited goods and services all influence the overall economy of the area. Of the total County population of 1,349 residents, 1,113 are over the age of 18 and 673 are currently working. Agriculture-related workers make up 48.4% of the employed labor force, 10.8% are employed in the construction field, and 9.7% are employed in education, health care, and social assistance positions.

EMPLOYMENT

As evidenced by the data in Table 6.1, the Town of Ekalaka reports its primary industries as construction and education, health care, and social assistance, followed by arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food; public administration; and retail trade.

Table 6.1 Carter County and Ekalaka Industries (Headwaters Economics, 2023)

	Carter County	Ekalaka
Number of Civilian Employees (> 16 years)	673	198
Industry	% of Workforce	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	48.4%	8.1%
Construction	10.8%	17.2%
Manufacturing	0.6%	2.0%
Wholesale trade	0.0%	0.0%
Retail trade	4.8%	10.1%
Transport, warehousing, and utilities	3.7%	4.0%
Information	0.4%	0.0%
Finance, insurance, and real estate	2.7%	5.6%
Professional, management, administration, and waste management	3.0%	5.1%
Education, health care, and social assistance	9.7%	17.2%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food	3.9%	10.6%
Other services, except public administration	5.8%	9.6%
Public administration	6.2%	10.6%

Agriculture plays an important role in the economy of eastern Montana, with 82.5% of the land in Carter County being dedicated to the industry. According to data published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, agricultural land in Carter County is comprised of 323 farms, with 1,767,723 acres in farmland. The market value of agricultural products sold totaled over \$70 million, and government subsidies to farm operators funded an additional \$7 million (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022). Government appropriations include such items as crop insurance premiums and disaster, conservation, and commodity subsidies.

Table 6.2 Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2022)

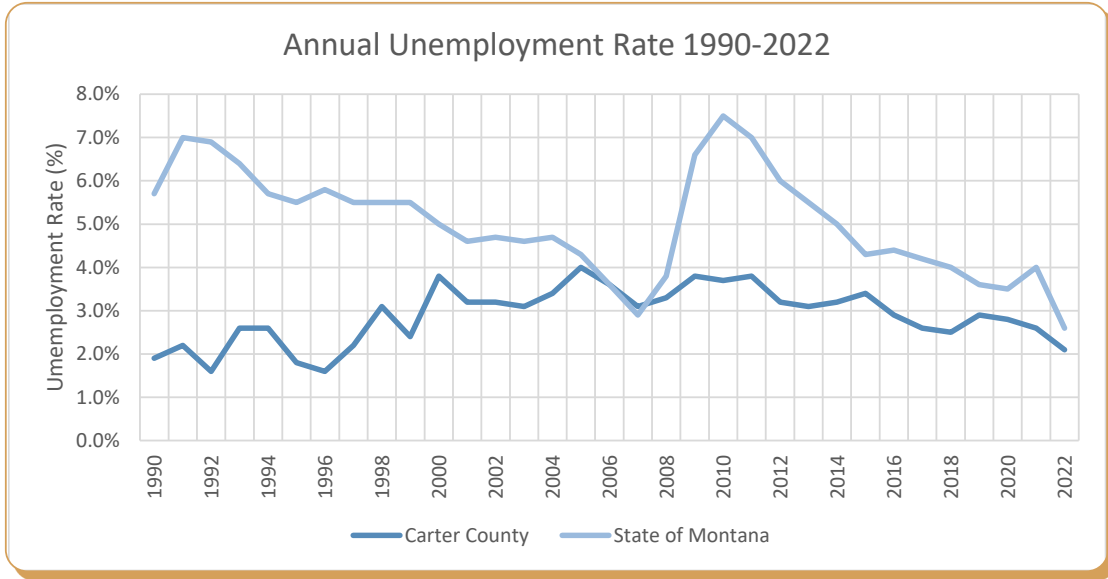
Crops	
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	\$4,444,000
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes	Withheld
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod	Withheld
Other crops and hay	Withheld
Livestock, Poultry, and Products	
Poultry and eggs	\$4,000
Cattle and calves	\$60,494,000
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	\$3,073,000
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	Withheld
Other animals and animal products	Withheld

**Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations.*

Carter County ranks 23rd in the State of Montana for total agricultural product sold, and 7th in the State for livestock, poultry, and associated products sold. These numbers provide evidence that the agricultural industry has an impact on the overall economic health of the County and its residents. Information detailing the number of farms and total acres of farmland in Carter County can be found in Chapter 4 Land Use of this document.

Carter County ranked lowest among Montana’s 56 counties with its 2.2% unemployment rate in December 2023. This rate was lower than the State unemployment rate of 3.8% for that same time period (MT Department of Labor & Industry, 2023). In general, the unemployment rate in Carter County has remained relatively stable. The unemployment rate for 1996, at 1.6%, was the lowest recorded, with the highest at 4.0% in 2005 (MT Department of Labor & Industry, 2023).

Figure 6.1 Unemployment Rates (MT Department of Labor & Industry, 2023)



Research published by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2015 that sought to understand the factors driving return migration to remote communities like Ekalaka echoed sentiments similar to Carter County Treasurer, Jesi Pierson, about living in a small town because of its isolation, safety, and opportunity to focus on family. Based on demographic data and interviews with high school reunion attendees in what they termed “geographically disadvantaged counties” nationwide, those researchers concluded that return migration, much of it family motivated, represented a major demographic force moving people into rural America. “Roughly half of the non-returnees interviewed were open to the possibility of returning or had considered such a move at one time, and the majority of these non-returnees cited work-related barriers as the primary reason for staying away,” the researchers wrote. “Those choosing to return came back primarily for family reasons and found ways to secure or create employment (Dietrich, 2021).”

6.2. INCOME

Based on information published by Headwaters Economics, in 2021, Carter County had a per capita income of \$28,721 and a median household income of \$41,447 (Headwaters Economics, 2023). By definition, per capita income is calculated by dividing the County’s total income by the population of the County. In contrast, median household income is based on the total number of households and families in the County, including those with no income, and is based on individuals aged 15 and over reporting an income.

Table 6.3 Household Income in 2021 (Headwaters Economics, 2023)

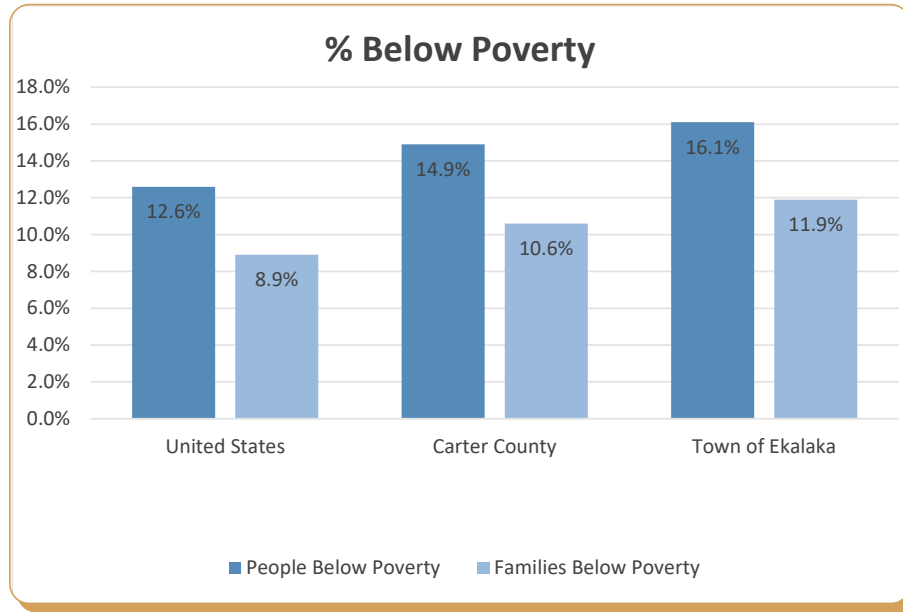
	Carter County
Total Households	618
Less than \$10,000	3.4%
\$10,000 to \$14,999	7.8%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	17.8%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	14.9%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	14.9%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	14.6%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13.6%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	6.0%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	2.3%
\$200,000 or more	4.9%

Table 6.4 Household Earnings by Source in 2021 (Headwaters Economics, 2023)

Income and Benefits (dollars)	Carter County	Town of Ekalaka
Mean earnings	\$63,171	\$45,644
Mean Social Security income	\$15,730	\$17,869
Mean retirement income	\$14,927	\$14,692
Mean Supplemental Security Income <i>(provided to adults and children with disability or blindness and people age 65+ who meet financial qualifications)</i>	\$14,754	\$14,754

Poverty levels in Carter County are above the national average, as shown in Figure 6.2. The County ranks 27th among Montana’s 56 counties with 13.2% of people living below poverty levels in 2022 (Montana Department of Commerce, 2023).

Figure 6.2 Poverty Levels in 2021 (Headwaters Economics, 2023)



The town’s soft infrastructure, the main street businesses, and public institutions necessary to support a cohesive community, are generally healthy. Bond measures passed in recent years have funded a new elementary school building in Ekalaka and put \$15.1 million towards a new hospital building – highly visible investments in the area’s future.

While the county has little active oil production inside its borders, a handful of pipelines cross its landscape, bolstering the tax base that supports county government and local schools.

As of 2020, the Montana Department of Revenue estimates the market value of Carter County’s class 9 utility property, which includes both pipelines and a small amount of electric company property, at \$407 million – twice the combined value of the county’s homes, businesses, agricultural land and other taxable property. When that market value is translated to taxable value, pipelines represent more than 90% of the county’s tax base (Dietrich, 2021).

6.3. ECONOMIC GROWTH

As reported in Chapter 3 Population of this document, Carter County’s population is projected to steadily increase until it reaches its peak in 2030, at which time it will begin decreasing until at least 2040. Growth in population only reinforces the need for continued economic development, the attraction of new industry, and increased opportunities for tourism. Promoting the opportunity to enjoy a rural lifestyle, while still earning competitive wages, will attract more people to the area and continue to bolster the economy.

One way to evaluate the economic sectors that deserve the most focus when working to improve the economy of Carter County is to evaluate the number of jobs in each industry, as identified in Table 6.1, and compare that to the number of jobs in each industry within the State of Montana. Base industries are those that have a higher percentage of the workforce locally as compared to statewide percentages, and expansion of these industries will result in additional growth of the overall economy. Likewise, industries that have a lower percentage of the workforce locally as compared to statewide percentages represent areas that may offer new opportunities for economic development strategies. See Table 6.5 for an overview of those industries likely to provide the most economic development.

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Table 6.5 Employment Data for Carter County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024)

Industry	Carter Employment 2022	Carter County Employment Shares 2022	Benchmark Region (Montana) Employment 2022	Benchmark Region (Montana) Employment Shares 2022	Location Quotient (LQ)
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining	318	0.480	37,914	0.068	7.059
Construction	78	0.118	50,349	0.090	1.311
Manufacturing	4	0.006	25,828	0.046	0.130
Wholesale Trade	2	0.003	15,258	0.027	0.111
Retail Trade	35	0.053	65,831	0.118	0.449
Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities	28	0.042	29,385	0.053	0.792
Information	4	0.006	9,010	0.016	0.375
Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate	17	0.026	33,440	0.060	0.433
Professional, Scientific, and Management	21	0.032	53,243	0.095	0.337
Education, Health Care, and Social Assistance	73	0.110	124,287	0.222	0.495
Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation, and Food	10	0.015	56,960	0.102	0.147
Other Services (except Public Administration)	30	0.045	28,054	0.050	0.900
Public Administration	43	0.065	30,045	0.054	1.204
Total	663	1.001	559,604	1.001	

	LQ less than 0.75: New opportunities for economic development strategies
	LQ greater than 1.25: Base industry whose expansion will result in increased growth

As identified by the data in Table 6.5, expansion of the agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting/mining and construction industries are likely to result in increased economic growth for Carter County. Additionally, the manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, information, finance/insurance/real estate, professional/scientific/management, education/health care/social assistance, and arts/entertainment/recreation/accommodation/food industries present new opportunities for economic development strategies.

6.4. TOURISM

Tourism helps fuel Carter County's economy. Visitors from both in state and out of state travel to Carter County to visit Medicine Rocks State Park to enjoy activities such as photography, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The park, which offers 12 campsites, is a haven for mule deer, antelope, woodhouse toads, and sharp tailed grouse.

The Carter County Museum is one of fourteen museums on the Montana Dinosaur Trail. Housed in a former automotive garage, the museum is Montana's first county museum and the first to display dinosaur fossils. The museum hosts several programs and events throughout the year. Since 2013, visitation at the Carter County Museum has increased over 500% from 1,000 to 5,844 annual visitors as many travel to Ekalaka to see the world-renowned dinosaur, American Indian, local history, and natural history displays. One of the standout events offered by the museum is the annual Dino Shindig, held at the end of July, which attracts paleontologists and dinosaur enthusiasts from around the world. The Dino Shindig has been named Montana's Event of the Year by Montana's Office of Tourism and Development. In 2019, over 900 visitors attended the event and visited the museum during the week leading up to the Shindig (Sanford, 2023). The museum volunteer corps has grown to 40 people, including students from Montana State University and Johns Hopkins University (GuideStar, 2023). In 2023, the museum reached a total audience of 144,515 people through on-site programming and educational outreach (GuideStar, 2023). Of that number, 5,502 visited the museum in person, including 3,487 non-residents, resulting in a regional economic impact of approximately \$1.3 million at \$400/person (Schultz, 2022).

Hunting, fishing, and trapping also remain popular tourist activities in Carter County.

Figure 6.3 Nonresident Visitor Spending in Carter County (Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, 2024)

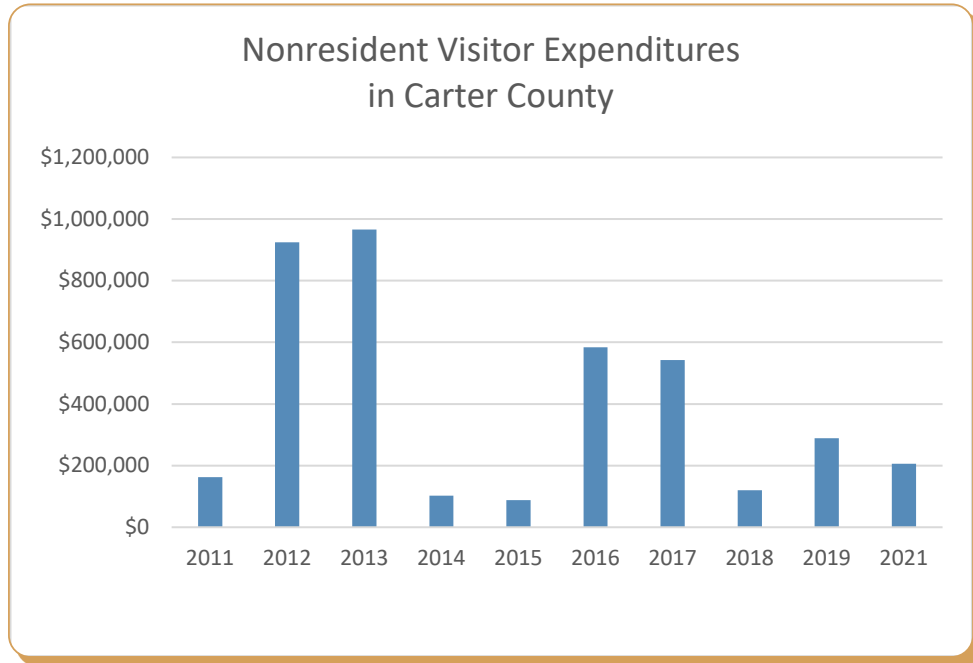


Figure 6.3 depicts nonresident visitor spending in Carter County from 2011 through 2021. Nonresident visitor spending in Carter County fell into one of eight categories: campground, gas/diesel, grocery/snacks, Made in Montana, outfitters/guides, rental cabins, restaurant/bar, or retail. Made in Montana products are grown, created, made, and/or enhanced in the state resulting in 50% or more in added value. The Made in Montana program is a certification program for products that are “authentically Montana” and is overseen by the Montana Department of Commerce (Montana Department of Commerce, 2024).

In 2022, a total of \$5,292,000 was spent by nonresidents on tourism activities in Carter County. Of this total, \$4,005,000 was spent on outfitters/guides. Because this amount is significantly higher than what was spent in previous years and could be an anomaly, it was not included in Figure 6.3.

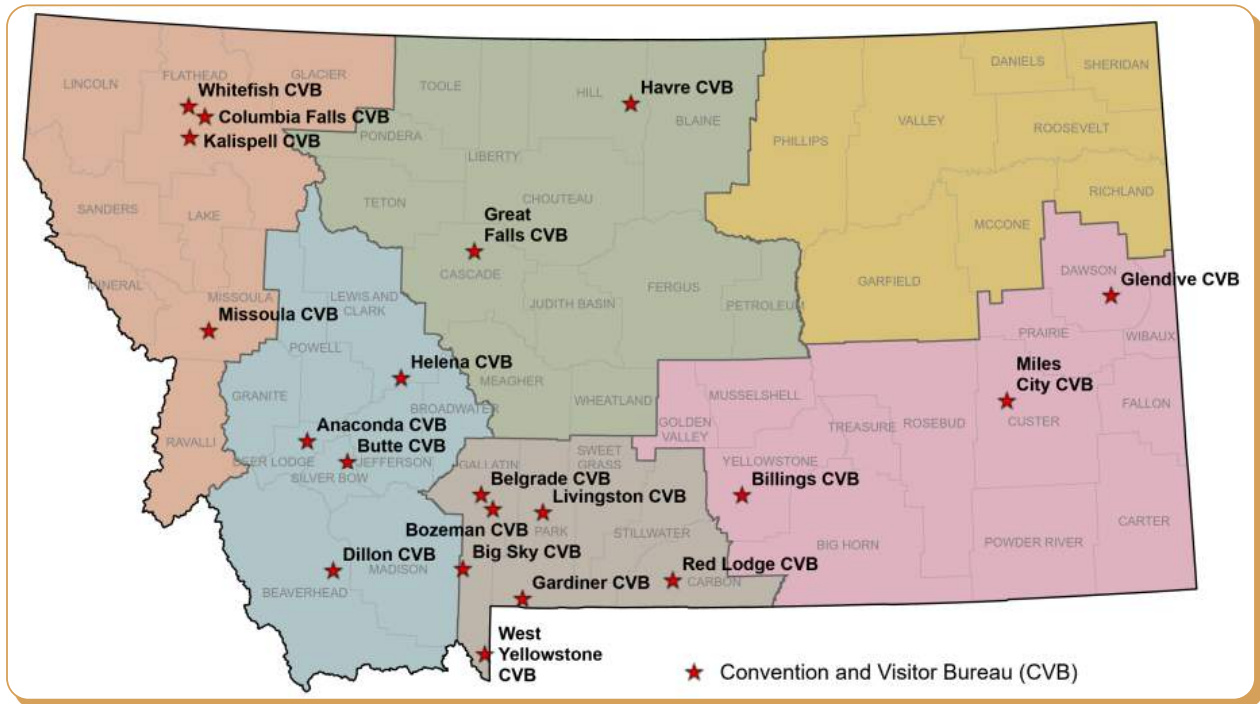
Table 6.6 details tourism spending in all of Southeast Montana, which includes the following counties:

- | | | |
|----------|---------------|-------------|
| Big Horn | Golden Valley | Rosebud |
| Carter | Musselshell | Treasure |
| Custer | Powder River | Yellowstone |
| Dawson | Prairie | Wibaux |
| Fallon | | |

The Southeast Region is illustrated in pink in Figure 6.4.

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Figure 6.4 Montana Tourism Regions (Montana Department of Commerce, 2024)



Not only are hunting and fishing available throughout the region, but summer events include rodeos, fairs, concerts, celebrations, and ethnic affairs. There are also art galleries, museums, horse shows, and reenactments (Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, 2022).

Table 6.6 Tourism Spending in Southeast Montana (Office of Tourism, 2024)

Year		# of Credit Cardholders* (thousands)	Amount Spent (millions)
2021	Resident	2,530	\$1,260
	Visitor	2,130	\$364
2022	Resident	2,610	\$1,342
	Visitor	2,110	\$393
2023	Resident	882	\$419
	Visitor	561	\$101

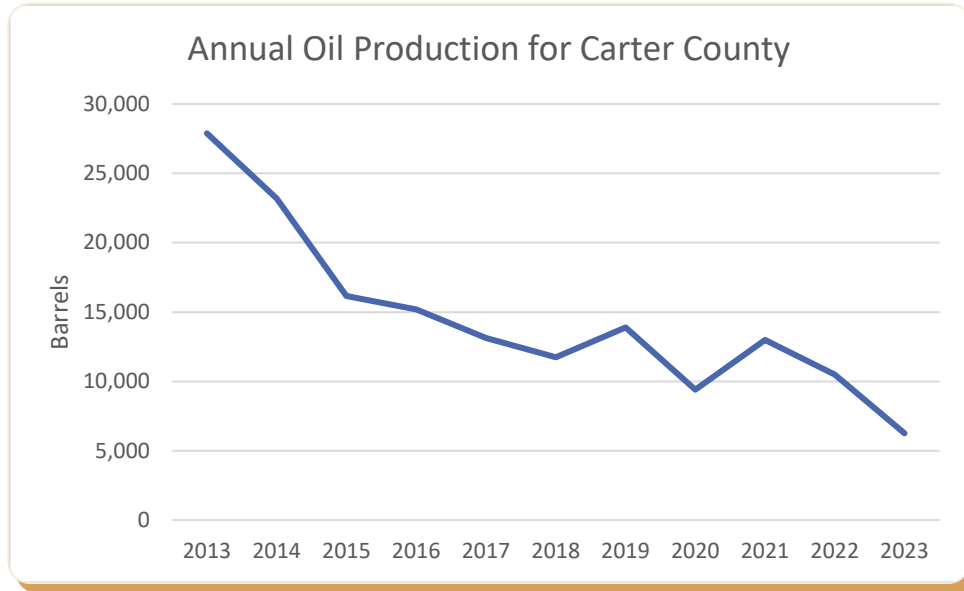
*This data is not meant to be comprehensive; credit card use in the region represents a subset of transactions.

The data in Table 6.6 indicates that visitors are travelling to the southeastern part of the state, including Carter County, and may present additional business and economic opportunities for the County.

6.5. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

There are 11 active oil and gas wells in Carter County, although none of the gas wells have been producing since 2013. Annual oil production for Carter County for the years 2013–2023 is illustrated in Figure 6.5. Given this information, economic and employment opportunities related to natural resource extraction in Carter County are limited.

Figure 6.5 Annual Oil Production for Carter County (Montana Board of Oil & Gas Conservation, 2024)



Alternative energy resources, like wind, are not likely to be a large source of economic development, although there is potential exploration of transmission lines for alternative energy options. Wind energy projects are developed by companies that seek out the areas with the strongest wind resource but also review other critical factors like access to land, access to transmission lines, ability to sell generated electricity, public engagement, and other significant development factors. There are currently no active or proposed wind energy projects in Carter County, according to Montana State University’s Wind and Renewables Center (Montana State University, 2024).

Due to the lack of population, industry, and employment it is critical that the County, which has a large amount of state and federal land in its land base, continues to receive Payment In Lieu of Taxes (PILT). This form of payment from the federal government that takes the place of full tax payment is subject to congressional approval. The failure of this program without a viable replacement would be devastating to the operation of Carter County’s government.

The Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) identified the following constraints on economic growth for the region, including Carter County:

- Insufficient/aging infrastructure
- Low population
- Attitudes
- Non-diversified economy

According to the EPEDC's 2022–2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), the region's ability to plan for and provide infrastructure will be the number one determinate of each community's ability to capitalize on economic activity and sustain itself into the future. Additionally, the declining, aging population has depleted the available workforce.

Moreover, both federal and state funding sources often offer grant opportunities for rural communities; however, these funding sources also make assumptions about the amount of match a community can provide to leverage such funds. Regarding attitudes, there is a perception that southeastern Montana is not competitive in the job market due to lacking infrastructure, low wages, and a long-term decline in population. Further, as agricultural production methods have become more efficient and farms have expanded, young people have left the region to find educational and employment opportunities elsewhere.

The CEDS also identified the following as assets of Carter County and the rest of the region:

- Location
- Communities
- Tourism
- Agriculture
- Natural resources
- Environment

The region's proximity to a wealth of experiences and cultural resources is significant since it is within a day's drive to many popular destinations. Strong rural communities are also considered an asset of southeastern Montana. Communities can claim relatively low crime rates, active volunteers, and family values with a common-sense approach to life as sources of pride in the region.

Tourism potential includes capitalizing on available hunting, recreation, dinosaur digs, working ranches, camping, historic sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail and the Dinosaur Trail, and special events. Communities are also beginning to embrace social media and technology as ways to attract a wide variety of tourists.

An abundance of high quality raw agricultural products such as wheat, barley, corn, oil seed crops, cattle and sheep, and meat processing are assets that provide an opportunity for development in the region.

Natural resource availability and development over the next several years will also play a significant role in the region's economy. Both natural resources for outdoor enthusiasts and natural resources for industry development represent regional strengths. Additionally, the region's unspoiled environment, clean air, and abundance of water, wind, sun, space, and wildlife are often touted as strengths (Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, 2022).

6.6. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 6.1	
Economic development that supports the agricultural sector of the economy and existing businesses.	
Objectives	Actions
Economic development activities that help sustain agriculture and existing businesses.	Work with EPEDC, MSU Extension, and other agricultural agencies to provide resources that target value-added agriculture or economic development.
	Work with Chamber of Commerce and other programs to support entrepreneur training and programs.
	Encourage study and training activities that identify existing needs of the community and how those needs might be filled by local businesses expanding their offering of goods and services.
	Utilize EPEDC for business retention efforts, which includes identifying local business needs for resources and training and encouraging local job creation.
	Work with EPEDC, Made in Montana, Grown in Montana, and Chamber of Commerce to support local businesses and promote niche markets for local products.
	Utilize EPEDC to coordinate partnerships with landowners, finance institutions, and public and non-profit sector to develop programs to support family farms.
	Ensure that the necessary services and infrastructure are maintained and expanded when necessary to encourage the continuation of local farming and ranching.
	Promote development within Ekalaka, existing unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for development where public facilities and infrastructure are available, and away from rural areas and areas used exclusively for agriculture.
	Local government to encourage development of standards that protect agricultural activities, including but not limited to spraying chemicals, burning fields, and use of machinery at any hour; control of domestic animals; maintenance of agricultural fencing; and protection of agricultural water user facilities, ditches, and water rights.

GOAL 6.2

Diversify the economic base with industries that do not threaten the rural lifestyle and/or create a strain on public services.

Objectives	Actions
Work with economic development organizations to attract industries that align with the Carter County rural lifestyle and do not create a strain on public services.	Target economic development efforts towards clean industries or industries that use sustainable development techniques.
	Coordinate with local, regional and state economic development programs.
	Cultivate new economy businesses such as telecommunications, alternative energy, internet, and home office workers.
	Develop tourism and heritage resources, such as the museum, to capture more tourist dollars.
	Promote opportunities for economic development based on recreational activities.
Set goals and policies that encourage economic development while protecting the infrastructure and environment in Carter County.	Local government to set policies that minimize environmental impacts of resource extraction industries.
	Local government to develop land use and public infrastructure policies that coordinate with economic development.
	Local government to include performance standards for potential nuisances from commercial and industrial development within regulations.
Address workforce needs of the community.	County and Town governments collaborate to support economic development projects including infrastructure, community amenities, and housing for workforce.
	Maintain County and Town budgets at a level that will support infrastructure, such as water, sewer, roads, and bridges, and maintain a safe, healthy, and attractive environment such as fire and police protection and weed management.
	Support expanded broadband and cellular service infrastructure within the county.

7. LOCAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC FACILITIES >>

7.1. FIRE PROTECTION

Headwaters Economics produces a report in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service that analyzes wildfire risk by County. The report considers wildfire risk and exposure, wildfire susceptibility, and land ownership. A report downloaded February 1, 2024 shows that populated areas in Carter County have, on average, greater risk of wildfire than 91% of counties in the state while risk to homes is 89% greater. 74% of homes in the county are exposed to wildfire from direct sources, such as adjacent flammable vegetation and 26% are exposed to wildfire from indirect sources, such as embers or home-to-home ignition (Headwaters Economics, 2024).

Fire protection is provided within jurisdictional boundaries of Carter County by the Carter County Rural Fire Department, Ekalaka Volunteer Fire Department, and Alzada Volunteer Fire Department. The Carter County Rural Fire Department is staffed by volunteers and is primarily responsible for wildland fires. It is managed by the Carter County Sheriff's Office. The town fire departments each have a service area of 20 to 75 miles surrounding the town. All fire protection agencies are served by the 911 Dispatch Center in Baker.

When the County's Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) was completed in 2016, the Carter County Rural Fire Department expressed the need for cold storage capable of housing seven or eight fire trucks. A 50'x100' building was proposed. The Rural Fire Department is still in need of a building for cold storage, as well as a heated area for storage and maintenance of fire trucks.

The Rural Fire Department currently owns 20 Type 6 wildland engines, two fire tenders, and one road grader. The County reported having an adequate number of volunteers to staff the Rural Fire Department and having a fire mitigation plan in place.

7.2. LAW ENFORCEMENT

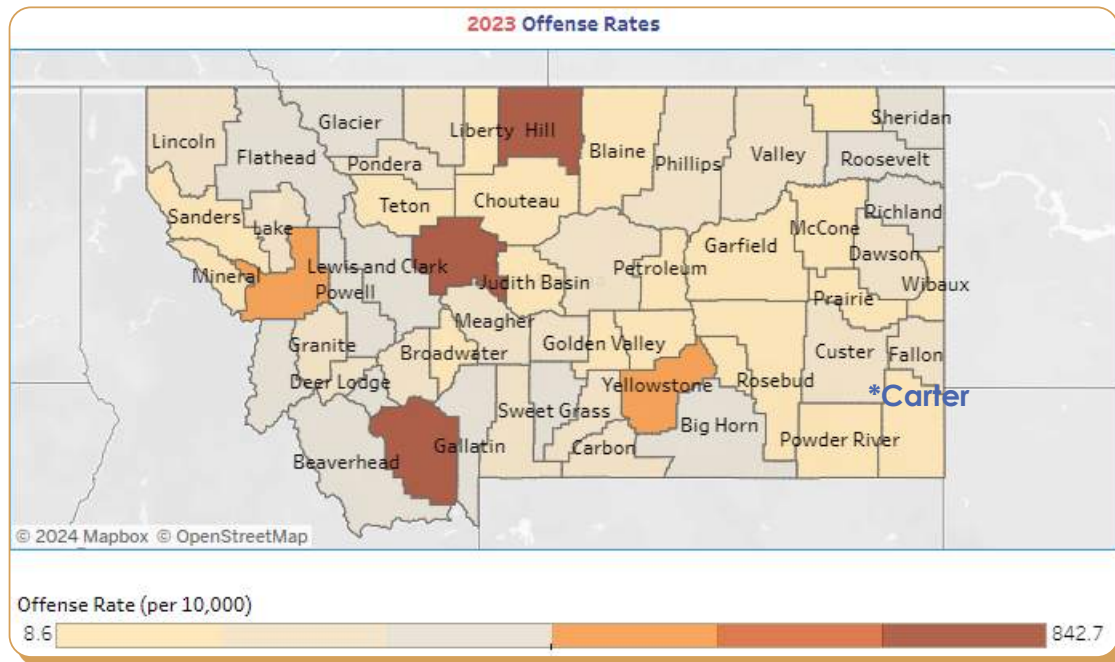
The Carter County Sheriff's Office provides law enforcement services throughout the county and is located in Ekalaka. The Sheriff's Office employs four full-time staff members, including the Sheriff, and one part-time staff member. The Sheriff's Office is served by the 911 Dispatch Center in Baker.

Every other year the Sheriff's Office requests funding for a new vehicle to ensure that the fleet is well maintained and operational. Additionally, the Sheriff's Office is in need of replacement vests, cameras, and radios and is considering acquiring a K-9.

The Town of Ekalaka does not have a police department, but the Town does have an agreement with the County to provide law enforcement services to the community. Additionally, there is a mutual aid agreement between the Sheriff's Office, Bureau of Land Management, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and the U.S. Forest Service, as well as a Memorandum of Understanding between Carter County and the neighboring counties, to provide law enforcement services.

Detailed offense rates for Carter County are not available, although Figure 7.1 shows that the offense rate per 10,000 people is 8.6, among the lowest reported in the state by the Montana Board of Crime Control Statistical Analysis Center (Montana Board of Crime Control, 2024).

Figure 7.1 Offense Rates by County (Montana Board of Crime Control, 2024)



In Carter County between the years 2014 and 2023, only one offense defined as a crime against a person was recorded: a murder/non-negligent manslaughter in 2017. Crimes against persons include aggravated assault, murder/manlaughter, rape, and robbery (Montana Board of Crime Control, 2024).

7.3. DISASTER AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

Carter County employs a Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) and Safety Coordinator. According to the Montana Disaster and Emergency Services – Current Situational Awareness website, there are currently no declarations in Carter County (Montana Disaster and Emergency Services, 2024).

7.4. PUBLIC HEALTH

Carter County Public Health’s mission is to protect and promote the health of the citizens and communities of Carter County. The office is located in Ekalaka and provides the following services:

- Immunizations and immunization record review;
- Blood pressure and glucose checks;
- Lice checks with education;
- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental nutrition program;
- Tobacco education program;
- Medication management;
- Testing for communicable diseases/illnesses;
- Car Seat safety checks;
- Mammogram screening and preventative oral healthcare events;
- State licensed daycare reviews;

- Telehealth location and connectivity equipment;
- Congregate Facilities Infection Prevention support, and
- Community health events and training and development opportunities (such as mental health/substance use prevention).

Carter County Public Health is currently in the process of conducting a community health assessment that will evaluate the community’s public health needs and wants. Carter County has a five-member Public Health Board whose purpose is to protect the health and safety of the citizens of Carter County by identifying, assessing, preventing, and ameliorating conditions of public health importance.

7.5. SOCIAL SERVICES

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

There is no local field office of public assistance located in Carter County. The nearest office is located 115 miles away in Miles City; however, most benefit programs may be administered online. Figure 7.2 illustrates the number of public assistance applications submitted by residents of Carter County since August 2017. Figure 7.3 indicates the amount of Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP; formerly food stamps) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits that have been paid on behalf of Carter County residents since August 2017.

Figure 7.2 Public Assistance Applications in Carter County (Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services, 2024)

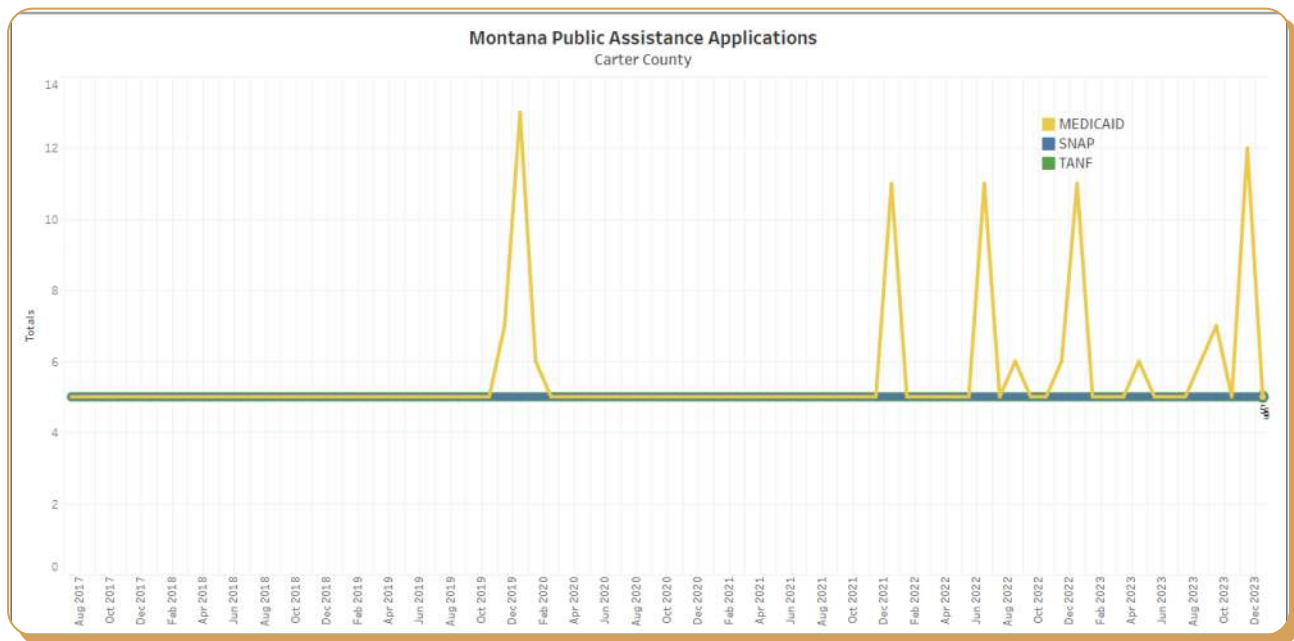
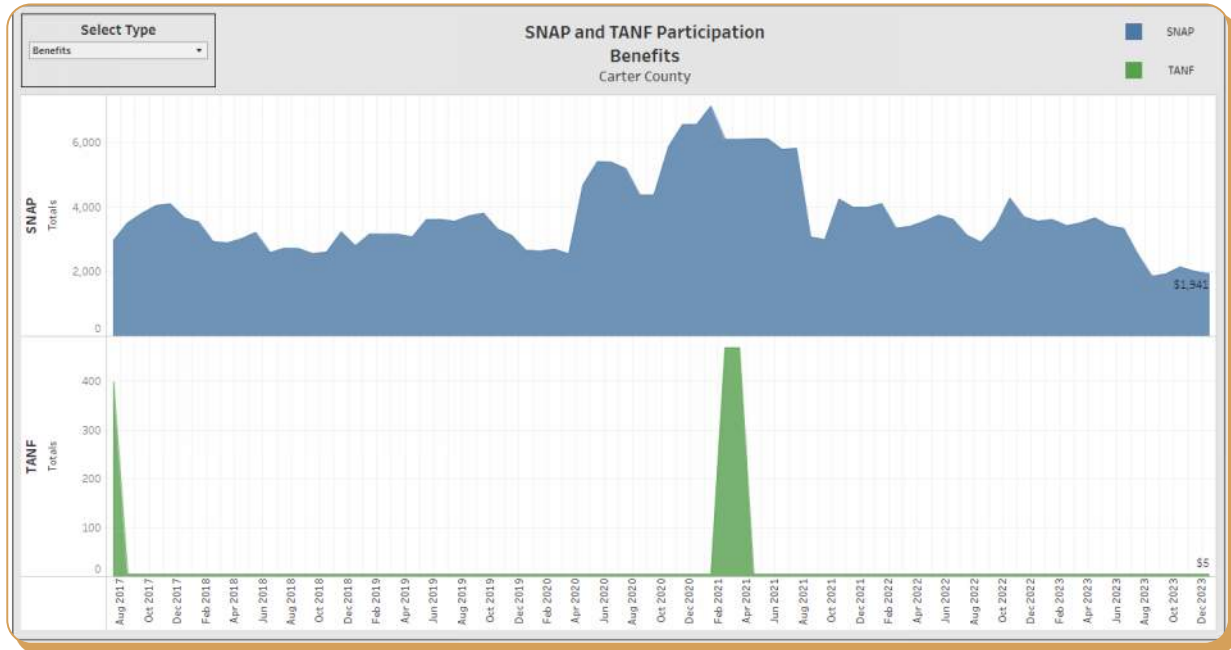


Figure 7.3 SNAP and TANF Benefits in Carter County
(Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services, 2024)



FOOD BANK

The Carter County Food Pantry is part of the Montana Food Bank Network and is located in the basement of the courthouse in Ekalaka.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Carter County is served by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) Child and Family Services Division through an office in Miles City (Custer County). This service protects children who have been or are at risk of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. The division assists with placing children in foster care, as well as provides support for adoption. Ideally, the goal is to maintain a child with his/her parents through reunification services that include counseling, parent education, and in-home services.

SENIOR SERVICES

Carter County employs a Senior Citizen Coordinator, based in the courthouse in Ekalaka. Services offered to senior residents of Carter County include:

- Congregate Meals at the Senior Citizens Center
- Meals on Wheels (home delivered meals)
- Adult Day Care (short term respite care at Dahl Memorial Nursing Home)
- Blood Pressure Checks (once a month during congregate meals)
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program (distribution of monthly food boxes for those who are eligible)
- Council on Aging (oversees local senior programs/services)
- Homemaker (assistance with light housework, laundry, shopping, and telephone calls)

DPHHS also provides senior and long-term care services in Carter County through the office in Helena. Services include community services/independent living, home/living options, financial planning, and protective/legal services, as well as collaboration with other service partners and providers.

7.6. HEALTH CARE

According to the Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for 2022–2027, the entire five-county region is served by a limited number of physicians, dentists, and pharmacists. Additionally, nearly all of Montana is considered a Health Professional Shortage Area for Mental Health Professions. Access to behavioral health services in rural and frontier settings is impeded by limited availability of resources, stigma, economic issues, caregiver stress and isolation, and overlapping relationships in small communities. Lack of transportation and the need to travel long distances to receive care are also issues. One mental health facility has been constructed in Dawson County (Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, 2022).

Carter County has one 25-bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH) and a rural health clinic located in Ekalaka. Dahl Memorial Healthcare Association offers a 24-hour emergency room, X-ray technology, and up-to-date telemedicine. Clinic services include routine/urgent/emergent care, cryotherapy, and wellness services from pediatrics to geriatrics (Dahl Memorial Healthcare Association, Inc., 2024). 21 out of the 25 beds are used for long-term care. The other beds are used for acute care.

Carter County owns the facilities operated by Dahl Memorial Healthcare Association. Funding for the hospital/nursing home is supported by a countywide mill levy. In November of 2021, construction of a new 40,900 square-foot building was completed to house the CAH, nursing home, and emergency department. An assessment regarding reuse of the old hospital facilities has been conducted and the County Commissioners are evaluating the options.

Carter County is served by the 911 Dispatch Center in Baker. Carter County owns the area ambulances and personnel are volunteer Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs). Ambulance services in Alzada are provided by Broadus or Belle Fourche, South Dakota (Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy, 2018).

7.7. EDUCATION

The Superintendent of Schools in Carter County is responsible for general supervision of the public schools, preserving all official school records, advising school trustees, acting as the hearing officer in school controversies resulting from decisions of district trustees, chairing the transportation committee, calculating levies for all school budgets with the county, registering educator and bus driver licenses, and receiving home school notifications. The Superintendent’s office is co-located with the Carter County Clerk of Court in Ekalaka.

Table 7.1 Carter County Public School Enrollment (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2024)

School	Town	Grades	2016 -2017	2017 -2018	2018 -2019	2019 -2020	2020 -2021	2021- 2022	2022 -2023
Alzada Elementary	Alzada	PK-8	4	3	5	6	9	11	13
Ekalaka Elementary	Ekalaka	PK-6	63	64	71	79	74	74	71
Ekalaka 7-8	Ekalaka	7-8	18	16	19	17	24	18	19

Carter County High School	Ekalaka	9-12	35	34	37	42	44	39	43
Hammond School	Hammond	PK-8	7	7	9	9	14	13	10
Hawks Home School	Hammond	PK-8	3	5	8	7	N/A	6	3

Enrollment for all students K-12 is shown in Table 7.1. Overall, Carter County school enrollment has remained relatively steady with a slight jump in the 2019-2021 school years. There are no private schools registered in the County. Families that opt for home schooling must register with the Carter County Superintendent of Schools.

Students from Alzada attend high school in Belle Fourche, South Dakota; Hulett, Wyoming; or Broadus, Montana. Students from Hawks Home School attend high school in Ekalaka or Broadus, while students from Hammond School attend high school in Broadus (Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy, 2018).

Nearby two-year institutions offering post-secondary education include:

- Dawson Community College; Glendive, MT (Public)
- Miles Community College; Miles City, MT (Public)
- Flathead Valley Community College; Kalispell, MT (Public)
- Great Falls College Montana State University; Great Falls, MT (Public)
- City College at Montana State University; Billings, MT (Public)
- University of Montana Helena College of Technology; Helena, MT (Public)
- Montana Tech College of Technology; Butte, MT (Public)
- Nearby four-year institutions offering post-secondary education include:
- University of Great Falls; Great Falls, MT (Private)
- Montana State University Billings; Billings, MT (Public)
- Montana State University; Bozeman, MT (Public)
- Montana State University Northern; Havre, MT (Public)
- University of Montana; Missoula, MT (Public)
- University of Montana Western; Dillon, MT (Public)
- Carroll College; Helena, MT (Private)
- Rocky Mountain College; Billings, MT (Private)
- Montana Bible College; Bozeman, MT (Private)
- Yellowstone Christian College; Billings, MT (Private)
- Montana Tech of the University of Montana; Butte, MT (Public)
- Black Hills State University; Spearfish, SD (Public)
- South Dakota School of Mines and Technology; Rapid City, SD (Public)
- Western Dakota Technical College; Rapid City, SD (Public)
- Dickinson State University; Dickinson, ND (Public)

Montana State University (MSU) provides extension services to Carter County and Fallon County residents through an office located in Baker. The Fallon/Carter County Extension Program extends University knowledge to the people who need it, even if they never set foot on a campus. It gives every Montanan access to useful information and expert help via workshops, demonstrations, community meetings, publications, videos, the Internet, and other sources.

Programs available through the Fallon/Carter County Extension Office include insect and spider identification; Montana Weed Seed Free Forage Certification; nitrate sampling of forages; plant and weed identification; plant disease and diagnosis; Private Pesticide Applicator’s licensing and education; and soil samples for testing.

7.8. NOXIOUS WEED MANAGEMENT

Weed management is provided by the Carter County Weed Department as a public service, as it is a critical service for the agricultural and recreational industries in the County. The Weed Department employs a Weed Coordinator and an Administrative Assistant. Carter County also maintains a five-member Weed Board. The board’s purpose is to oversee the management and eradication of noxious weeds in Carter County.

When the 2016 CCIP was completed, the Carter County Weed Department had plans to rehabilitate their facilities (roof repairs, additional insulation, and a new door for the shop and electricity, lighting, and insulation for the attached lean-to). While these improvements have been made, the Ekalaka Airport Master Plan completed by KLJ in August 2022 recommended that the Weed Department be relocated based on several airport development alternatives. As a result, the Carter County Commissioners are tasked with finding a new suitable location to house the Weed Department office and equipment.

Noxious weeds found in Carter County have been identified by the Montana Weed Control Association and are listed in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Noxious Weeds in Carter County (Montana Weed Control Association, 2024)

Species	Latin Name	Other Names
Common Burdock	<i>Arctium minus</i>	Lesser Burdock, Little Burdock
Common Mullein	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	Great Mullein, Velvet Plant, Woolly Mullein
Poison Hemlock	<i>Conium maculatum</i>	Poison-hemlock, Devil's Bread, Carrot Fern, Devil's Porridge, Poison Parsley, Spotted Corobane, Spotted Hemlock

7.9. LAND CONSERVATION

The Carter County Conservation District (CCCD) is a board of seven locally elected officials who work to encourage voluntary, commonsense conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources in Carter County. The Conservation District’s office is located in Ekalaka.

In May 2020, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) prepared a Long Range Plan for the Ekalaka Field Office. The Long Range plan considers both private and public lands throughout Carter County as it identifies and documents conservation problems and opportunities. The plan outlines measures to address local resource concerns and develop best management practices for the sustainable use of Carter County’s natural resources (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2020).

7.10. COMMUNICATIONS

Mid-Rivers Communications is the only local carrier that provides communication services to all of Carter County. Mid-Rivers offers telephone service and high-speed internet. Range Telephone Cooperative and West River Telephone Cooperative also provide services to parts of Carter County. National carriers that provide coverage in Carter County include Verizon, T-Mobile, High-Speed Solutions, and Dish-Network.

7.11. ELECTRICITY AND NATURAL GAS

Residents of Carter County receive electricity from Southeast Electric Cooperative based in Ekalaka. Southeast Electric Cooperative was incorporated in 1946 because large investor-owned power companies would not provide service to sparsely populated areas due to a lack of profitability. A cooperative approach was needed to build and maintain a transmission and distribution power line system able to provide electricity to the cooperative’s service area, which includes parts of Carter, Custer, Fallon, and Powder River counties in Montana, as well as Harding County in South Dakota and Crook County in Wyoming.

Montana-Dakota Utilities provides natural gas to residents of Alzada. Montana-Dakota Utilities is based in Bismarck, North Dakota and provides retail natural gas and/or electric service to parts of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming.

7.12. TRANSPORTATION

There are five roads under the jurisdiction of the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in Carter County as illustrated in Figure 7.4.

- U.S. Highway 212 (National Highway System Non-Interstate – 37 miles)
- Montana Highway 7/Route 323 (Primary Highway – 84 miles)
- Route 277 (Secondary Highway – 34 miles)
- Route 326 (Secondary Highway – 2 miles)
- Route 328 (Secondary Highway – 19 miles)

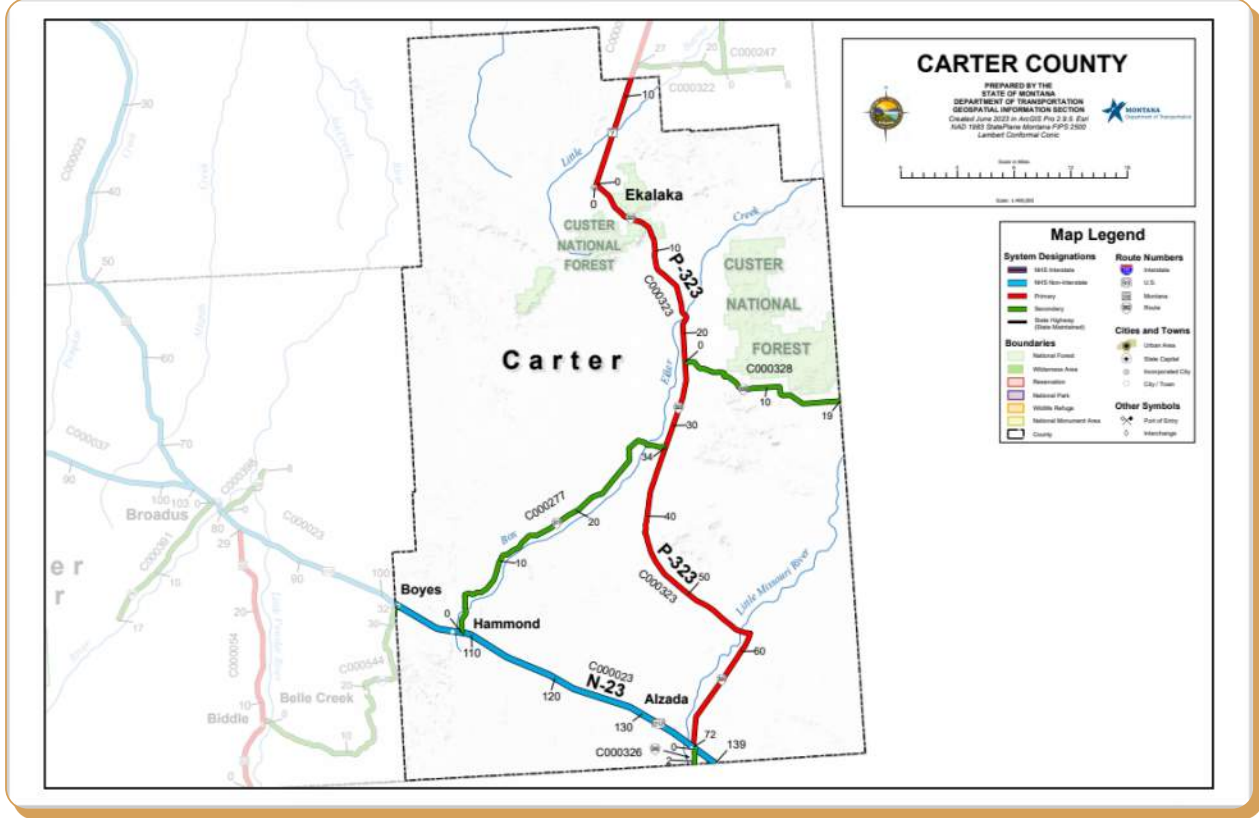
MDT prepares a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) annually, which covers a period of four years. The 2023-2027 STIP identifies the following projects in Carter County:

Table 7.3 Carter County Projects in the MDT STIP (Montana Department of Transportation, 2024)

Fiscal Year	Project Name	Road	Project Scope
2023	Alzada – East & West	US-212	9.551 miles of overlay – cold mill
2025	North of Ekalaka – North	MT-7	8.497 miles of reconstruction
2026	North of Ekalaka – North	MT-7	8.497 miles of reconstruction

The draft 2024-2028 STIP moves the 2026 project date to 2028.

Figure 7.4 Carter County Highway Map (Montana Department of Transportation, 2024)



Ekalaka maintains the local streets and alleys within the town limits. The Carter County Road and Bridge Department is responsible for the network of roads and bridges throughout the unincorporated portion of the County and not included in the state highway system. The Road and Bridge Department budget is generally used for road maintenance, equipment, and personnel. The budget is funded through a mill levy tax.

Table 7.4 County Road and Bridge Information

Carter County Roads and Bridges	
Miles of Gravel Roads	650
# Bridges over 20-feet in length	41
# Bridges 20-feet or less in length	1

As identified in Table 7.4, bridges are broken into two categories:

- **MAJOR STRUCTURE:** bridges greater than 20-feet in length are inspected biennially by MDT. Based on current MDT records, there are 41 bridges in this category located in Carter County. Although major structures are inspected by MDT, they may be the fiscal responsibility of Carter County for repair or replacement. Of these 41 bridges, 31 bridges are the responsibility of Carter County.
- **MINOR STRUCTURE:** bridges less than 20-feet in length are not inspected regularly by MDT or Carter County crews. There is currently one bridge in this category that is the responsibility of MDT.

Carter County offers transportation services for the elderly, disabled, minorities, and the general public through the Carter Charter program. Citizens call the dispatcher and the dispatcher calls the driver. The driver then calls to arrange the pick-up time. Senior citizens and disabled persons with medical appointments take top priority. Suggested donations for medical trips to various locations throughout the County are listed on the County’s website.

7.13. WATER SUPPLY

Carter County does not operate any public water systems; however, a public water system exists in the Town of Ekalaka. Ekalaka also has a bulk water station to serve outside homeowners and ranchers. All other residences of the County have private wells or cisterns (Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy, 2018). The Town is currently in the beginning stages of a \$2.2 million project funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to improve their public water system.

Table 7.5 Public Water Supply System in Carter County (Drinking Water Branch, 2024)

Location	Water Source	Population Served	Service Connections
Town of Ekalaka	4 Wells	400	365

7.14. WASTEWATER COLLECTION AND TREATMENT

Carter County is not responsible for operating or maintaining any public wastewater systems. The Town of Ekalaka has a wastewater system and lagoon area with three cells that were upgraded in 2017. An ultraviolet light (UV) system is used to filter wastewater before it is discharged to Russell Creek. The remainder of the County utilizes individual septic systems (Comprehensive Plan and Growth Policy, 2018). The Town’s wastewater system is currently meeting the needs of the community.

Individual septic systems must be approved by the County Sanitarian. The Carter County Sanitarian and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) must review any development with an area of less than 20 acres.

7.15. SOLID WASTE

Solid waste services in Carter County are provided by South East Trash Removal in Ekalaka. The Town of Ekalaka operates a transfer station that accepts the following types of waste: construction and demolition, municipal solid waste, recyclables, and yard waste. Waste is then transported to the landfill in Baker. Residents of Alzada haul their solid waste to Belle Fourche, South Dakota.

Solid waste services in the County are sufficient at this time, although, like many industries and businesses, the company responsible for transferring the waste containers struggles to maintain an adequate number of employees.

7.16. COURTHOUSE

The Carter County Courthouse is a three-story building that was constructed in 1920 and is the County’s oldest building. It was updated in 2012. An addition and elevator for accessibility were added in 2014. The courthouse houses a number of county departments, including

the offices of the Treasurer, Clerk and Recorder, Commissioners, Attorney, Department of Revenue, Disaster and Emergency Services, Extension Agent, Food Bank, Justice of the Peace, Sheriff, Superintendent of Schools, and Senior Services Coordinator. The building is in good condition and meets the County's needs.

7.17. EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

The County owns the ambulance garage, which is located next to the courthouse and was built in 1972. It houses two ambulances and does not currently meet the needs of the County.

7.18. FAIRGROUNDS

The County owns and maintains several buildings on West Speelmon Street in Ekalaka. Among other activities, the County Fair is held at this location. The fairgrounds are comprised of a community center, exhibit hall, stock barn, sheep pole barn, pole shed, toilet facilities, and open-faced shade shed.

The community center needs additional space for storage, office space, and a dedicated concession area. Currently, a wooden building with electricity is utilized as a concession stand. Additionally, existing storage for fair equipment and supplies consists of a portable storage container. The County would like to extend the community center to include a designated storage area. As of yet, the County Fair Board has not made any of these changes. Minor improvements and maintenance activities are performed annually to ensure the County can host the fair.

Given the age and condition of the barns and outdoor bathroom facilities, the Fair Board is developing plans that would include office space, concession space, bathroom/shower space, storage space, and an indoor barn/arena that would include space for all of the animals during the fair and a show ring. The arena would be available for use throughout the year. The Fair Board is also working on obtaining additional lighting to facilitate safety. The Fair Board is researching grants to help fund this project.

7.19. MUSEUM

The Carter County Museum was established in 1936. It was initially located in the Carter County High School but moved to its current location in a former automotive garage in the late 1970s.

The museum is in need of expanded facilities. Despite being 5,800 square feet, only 10% of the museum's collection is viewable. The remaining 90% remains stored away off-site because there is no additional exhibition or storage space in the current museum, nor is there adequate support space to accommodate staff and volunteers to properly curate our heritage. This means that important, historically significant fossils and artifacts are hidden away, including the multiple dozens of new specimens that are unearthed each year. Data shows that in-person visits to the museum generate \$400 per non-resident visit in the region, meaning the Carter County Museum generated a minimum of \$1 million in economic impact in 2023 alone. And that's with just 10% of the museum's collection on display. Imagine what more could be done with more space and more staff (Rose, 2023).

A feasibility study was completed in June 2023 by High Plains Architects detailing the proposed expansion and renovation of the museum. The planned expansion will add approximately 15,000 square feet, fully utilizing the available land space to better reflect the

world-class nature of the museum’s collections. The expansion focuses on three primary improvements and additions:

- **Guest Services:** A new entrance, lobby, reception area, and restrooms will provide essential amenities, create a positive initial experience, and create a welcoming atmosphere that prepares visitors to experience the museum.
- **Exhibition Space:** Serving as the core of the museum, the expanded space will seamlessly connect to the current space and offer additional space to display the museum’s vast and diverse collections, artifacts, specimens, and exhibits, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in the museum’s offerings and engage with the displays.
- **Museum Support Space:** Housing various functional spaces for the “behind the scenes” work required for the museum’s smooth operation, this includes staff spaces, laboratories, offices, collections storage areas, and mechanical spaces.

This will address the current inadequacies of the existing building, including the need to reinforce over-stressed roof trusses, which currently show signs of failure and deformation in the roof visible from the exterior. Installing an HVAC system will better preserve cultural collections and increase visitor comfort, museum quality lighting in the remaining areas of the current building and throughout the expansion will create better conditions for the continued preservation of heritage collections, and the expansion will provide industry standard storage and exhibition solutions worthy of the museum’s world-class fossil and cultural heritage collection (Sanford, 2023).

The full renovation and expansion of the facility will accommodate the museum’s growing collection, create ample space for laboratories, and ensure a quality museum experience for all visitors. Moreover, the expansion will incorporate sustainable design and historic elements to honor the history of the museum and the building while ensuring it has the space needed to deliver on its mission.

The renovation of the existing building and construction of the expansion would support total in-state spending at businesses in Montana of \$13 million in 2026 dollars, or an average of \$7 million per year. This level of activity would support 33 full-time and part-time jobs per year. The economic and employment impacts are generated by direct investment, supply chain purchases (direct impacts), and spending throughout the state by employees and proprietors of affected businesses. With the expanded facility, it is anticipated that visitation will reach 10,000 people per year and double the museum’s economic impact to at least \$2 million in the region (Sanford, 2023).

The renovation and expansion of the museum is a high priority project detailed in the Carter County Capital Improvements Plan (revised in 2020), the Carter County Long Range Plan (2020), the Town of Ekalaka Community Plan (2023), and the Carter County Growth Policy (forthcoming in 2024). The museum is actively progressing forward with efforts to expand its facilities and hopes to break ground on an expansion in 2026, the museum’s 90th anniversary.

7.20. AIRPORT

There is one public use airport in Carter County. Located in Ekalaka, the Ekalaka Airport (97M) has one runway. Runway 13/31 is 3,798 feet long and 75 feet wide, comprised of asphalt, and in excellent condition.

The airport is owned and maintained by Carter County and managed by the Airport Board. 100LL fuel is available via self-service credit card. Hangars and tiedowns for parking are also available. There are six single engine aircraft based at the Ekalaka Airport. The airport is a general aviation facility, meaning scheduled commercial airline flights are not available. Those who fly into Ekalaka do so to perform aerial spraying, air ambulance services, hunt/fish, visit friends and relatives, view property for real estate sales, aerial photography, and occasionally firefighting support. Approximately 2,700 annual operations are forecasted to take place in the year 2026 (KLJ, 2022).

Ekalaka Airport is also part of the U.S. Air Force's Powder River Training Complex, which is the largest air training complex in the continental U.S. Personnel from Ellsworth Air Force Base in Rapid City, South Dakota utilize the complex to train and practice maneuvers.

The 2016 CCIP refers to a runway extension and parallel taxiway with an environmental review taking place in 2024, followed by land acquisition in 2025 and construction in 2026. This project is on track to be completed as scheduled.

7.21. CAMP NEEDMORE

The County owns and maintains Camp Needmore, located at 501 State Highway 323, which is comprised of a kitchen, dining hall, bathroom facilities, and barracks. Although the facilities are owned by Carter County, the land is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. This campground is maintained as a community service for large groups, such as family reunions, holiday celebrations, or weddings. Additionally, 4-H organizations from seven counties conduct summer camp here. The facility is overseen by a Board of Directors that consists of three members from Carter County and three members from Fallon County. The camp employs a caretaker.

Fees generated by events held at the camp constitute less than half of the budget. The remaining expenses for management of the camp are paid by Carter County.

When the County's CCIP was completed in 2016, considerable repairs were identified to ensure Camp Needmore continues to provide economic benefit to the community. The board is developing a plan to make improvements to the cabins one at a time. These improvements will include heating, windows, doors, and insulation.

7.22. PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Ekalaka Public Library is located at 105 North Main Street. The Town of Ekalaka is responsible for maintaining and operating the library. The library lends books and other materials, provides public access to computers/fax/copy services, and hosts public service presentations and author meet-and-greets. The building that houses the public library is in good condition and currently meets the needs of the County.

7.23. SENIOR CITIZENS CENTER

The Senior Citizens Center, located on Main Street, is in good condition. Although it is small and a larger facility is desirable, it adequately meets the needs of the County at this time.

7.24. CEMETERY

Carter County has nine community cemeteries and six ranch cemeteries. The County is responsible for the operation and maintenance of Elgin Cemetery located 14 miles south of Ekalaka near McCabe Road. The County purchased the cemetery in 1945.

7.25. ADDITIONAL COUNTY FACILITIES

Other facilities owned and maintained by the County include a county shed (585 Chicago Avenue, Ekalaka); bleachers (201 Hedges Avenue, Ekalaka); office/storage (226 Spring Street, Alzada); conservation building and 20'x40' building (562 Central Avenue, Ekalaka); administrative building, garage, and pole barn (305 Putnam Avenue, Ekalaka); county shop (83 State Highway 323, Ekalaka); and 40'x96' storage building and pole barn (50 State Highway 323, Ekalaka).

7.26. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

Multiple County departments/facilities are presently in need of capital improvements, including the Rural Fire Department, Weed Department, EMS, Fairgrounds, and Camp Needmore. Additionally, expansion plans for the Carter County Museum are gaining momentum. Several local residents have also suggested there is a need for the County to provide water/sewer utilities and high-speed internet services.

As noted in section 7.6, the County completed construction of a new hospital in 2021 and is evaluating how to repurpose the old facilities to better serve the community. In October 2023, Adaapta prepared a community engagement summary detailing the activities and results of their efforts to solicit input from Carter County residents regarding the reuse or redevelopment of the old hospital facilities.

Through Adaapta's efforts, Carter County residents identified the community's top weaknesses by category as being housing, transportation infrastructure, and growth and economic opportunity. Top reuse ideas identified by residents included a recreational center, assisted living, office space, senior center, housing, daycare, and public health. When asked to vote for or against these ideas, residents favored a daycare, housing, senior center, and recreational center (Adaapta, 2023).

7.27. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 7.1	
Serve the public health and social service needs of all residents in Carter County (more health care providers and educational opportunities surrounding public health issues).	
Objectives	Actions
Provide public health and social services that promote the health and welfare of Carter County residents.	Support the goals and objectives of the Carter County Community Health Needs Assessment.
	Local government to support the social service providers within the county, providing public assistance, child and family services, and senior services.

GOAL 7.2

Maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed to serve County residents of all ages, incomes, and special needs groups.

Objectives	Actions
<p>Systematically plan and budget for capital improvements within the Town and County to efficiently maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed.</p>	<p>Local government to prepare and utilize the Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) for Carter County and Ekalaka. Commission/Council to review and update CCIP annually as needs change.</p>
	<p>Local government to support upgrades of public facilities for ADA compliance.</p>
	<p>Carter County to support the Town of Ekalaka in their efforts to plan, fund, and build water, sewer, roads, and utilities through state and federal funding mechanisms.</p>
	<p>Carter County Planning Board and local government to encourage leveraging additional resources for infrastructure through private/public partnerships.</p>
	<p>Carter County Planning Board and local government to consider policies that require developers to pay a proportional share for infrastructure upgrades and expansion.</p>
<p>Maintain the existing county roads and bridges efficiently, economically, and based on standard criteria.</p>	<p>Local government to follow the recommendations for maintenance and improvements to the County/Town transportation systems outlined in the CCIP.</p>
	<p>Local government to stay apprised of funding opportunities and secure financial assistance as available from programs that may help leverage local funds in the maintenance of county roads, bridges, and pedestrian facilities (i.e. MCEP, FLAP, TA, etc.)</p>
	<p>County/Town staff and officials to communicate with MDT personnel on a regular basis to take advantage of MDT road, bridge, and transportation alternative programs.</p>
	<p>County Commissioners have addressed transportation impacts from commercial/industrial activity and will continue to assess the need to negotiate with developers or other industries doing business in the county when significant impacts are anticipated.</p>

8. NATURAL RESOURCES AND RECREATIONAL ACCESS >>

Carter County’s Long Range Plan, completed in May 2020 by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, includes the following on page 32:

The County Commissioners have expressed an interest in expanding opportunities for tourism and recreation in the area. What they would really like is a reservoir (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2020).

8.1. LAND COVER

Custer Gallatin National Forest – Sioux Ranger District is located in the southeast corner of Carter County and the northwest corner of South Dakota. The area, which consists of hills or mesas of ponderosa pine rising above rolling grasslands, offers antelope, mule deer, white-tail deer, and turkey hunting. It is also rich in archeological and paleontological resources, produces some oil, and supports a sizable domestic livestock population.

The Sioux Ranger District has numerous opportunities for dispersed recreation, including hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobile riding, and cross-country skiing. There are no designated hiking trails, but most of the ridges are open and provide panoramic views. Additionally, two stocked fishing ponds with populations of crappie, bass, and rainbow trout can be found in the District (USDA and U.S. Forest Service, 2024).

Table 8.1 details the land cover in Carter County, while Figure 8.1 provides an illustration of it. The Great Plains Mixedgrass Prairie system that comprises 42% of Carter County covers much of the eastern two-thirds of Montana, occurring continuously for hundreds of square kilometers, interrupted only by wetland/riparian areas or sand prairies. Soils are primarily fine and medium-textured. The growing season averages 115 days, ranging from 100 days on the Canadian border to 130 days on the Wyoming border. Climate is typical of mid-continental regions with long severe winters and hot summers (Natural Heritage Map Viewer, 2024). Table 8.2 provides the monthly climate summary for Ekalaka.

Table 8.1 Carter County Land Cover Summary (Natural Heritage Map Viewer, 2024)

	Acres	Percent
Grassland Systems	893,069	42%
Shrubland and Steppe Systems	705,134	33%
Human Land Use	210,231	10%
Agriculture (cultivated crops and pasture/hay)	196,989	9%
Developed	13,236	1%
Mining and Resource Extraction	6	<1%
Wetland and Riparian Systems	123,741	6%
Forest and Woodland Systems	84,471	4%
Sparse and Barren Systems	64,454	3%
Recently Disturbed or Modified	60,304	3%

Figure 8.1 Carter County Land Cover Map

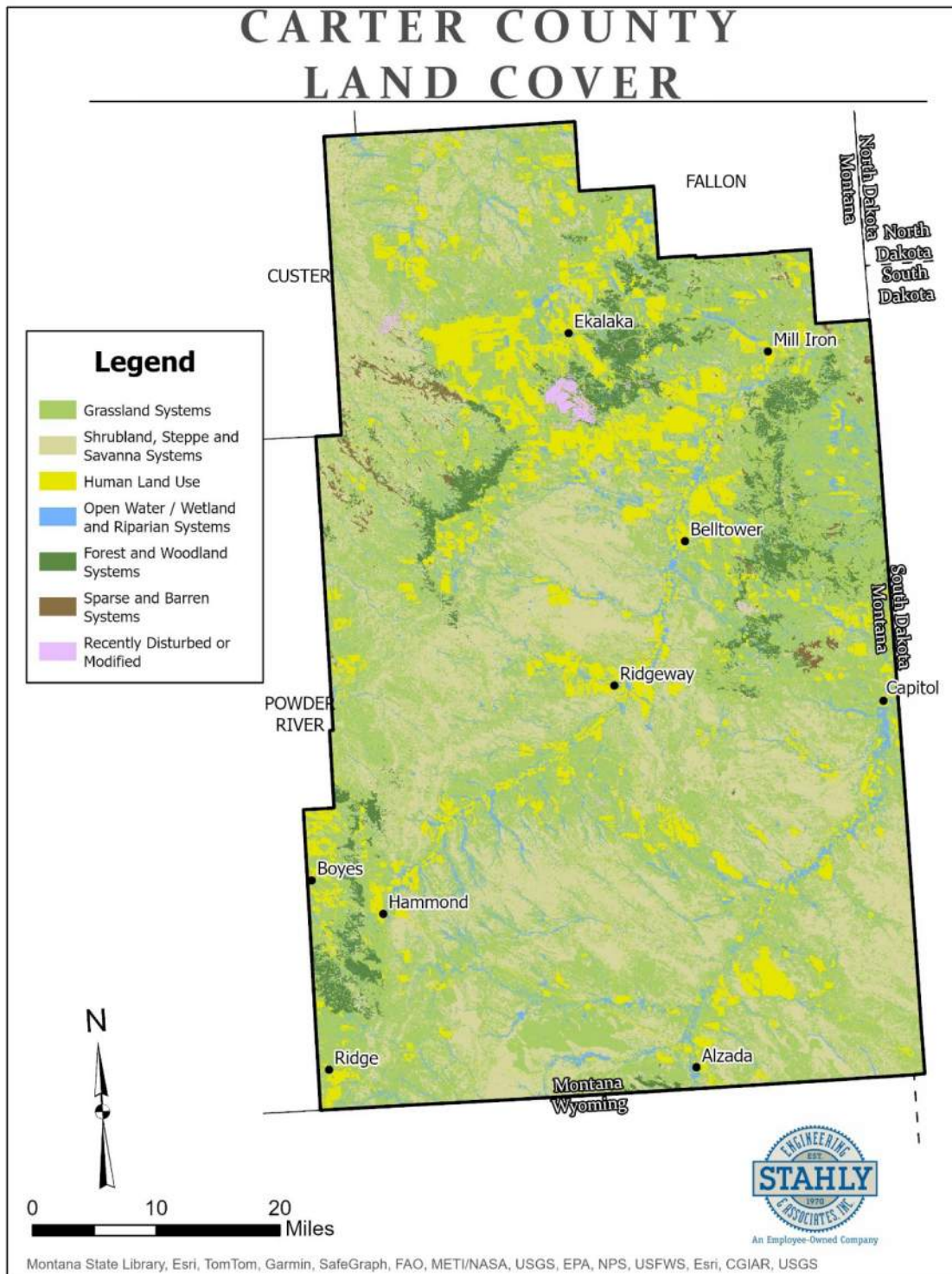


Table 8.2 Monthly Climate Summary for Ekalaka (Western Regional Climate Center, 2024)

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	Annual
Ave. Max. Temp. (F)	29.7	33.3	42.8	56.6	67.1	76.5	85.9	84.5	73.0	59.4	43.2	32.9	57.1
Ave. Min. Temp. (F)	7.5	10.9	19.6	30.5	40.4	49.7	56.3	54.3	44.0	33.0	20.7	11.5	31.5
Ave. Total Precipitation (in.)	0.46	0.43	0.73	1.39	2.53	3.13	1.84	1.33	1.36	1.03	0.53	0.42	15.19
Ave. Total Snowfall (in.)	5.4	5.7	6.1	3.1	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.7	4.5	4.6	32.1
Ave. Snow Depth (in.)	3.0	3.0	2.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	2.0	1.0

**Period of record: 11/23/1896 to 06/10/2016*

8.2. RIVERS, STREAMS, LAKES, WETLANDS, AND WATERSHEDS

There are no rivers that fall within the Nationwide Rivers Inventory in Carter County. According to the National Park Service, the Nationwide Rivers Inventory consists of more than 3,200 free-flowing river segments in the U.S. that are believed to possess one or more “outstandingly remarkable” values.

Major streams in semi-arid Carter County include Box Elder Creek and the Little Missouri River. Carter County consists of six subbasin watersheds: Boxelder, Little Powder, Lower Belle Fourche, Lower Powder, O’Fallon, and Upper Little Missouri (Montana State Library, 2024). None of these watersheds are part of the Montana Watershed Plan.

8.3. FISH AND WILDLIFE

Table 8.3 provides a species snapshot for Carter County. There are over 500 species of animals and nearly 600 species of plants living throughout Carter County.

Table 8.3 Species Snapshot for Carter County (Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024)

	Species of Concern	Potential SOC	MT Special Status	Other Status	Invasive and Pest	Total
Mammals	13	4		38		55
Birds	38	12	1	187		238
Reptiles	3			8		11
Amphibians	2			4		6
Fish	3	4		27	1	35
Invertebrates	3	12		142	1	157
All Animals	62	32	1	406	1	502
Vascular Plants	29	7		520	13	569
Bryophytes				13		13
Lichens				12		12
Algae				1		1
All Plants	29	7	1	547	13	596

There exists a unique relationship between wildlife and humans in Carter County. With sparse and concentrated development in proximity to wildlife habitats, the importance of planning and management is critical for the safety of county residents, protecting their livelihoods, and ensuring wildlife remain an important feature of the County.

8.4. MEDICINE ROCKS STATE PARK

Medicine Rocks State Park is comprised of weathered sandstone rock formations with a Swiss cheese look (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2024). Outdoor activities at Medicine Rocks State Park include camping, boating, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. Photography and wildlife viewing are also popular at the park where visitors can observe thousands of inscriptions on the sandstone pillars dating back centuries. The park is also a haven for mule deer, antelope, woodhouse’s toads, and sharp tailed grouse. Twelve campsites are available on a first come, first served basis. The park has an elevation of 3,379 feet and spans 330 acres (Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 2024).

8.5. MINING

Openpit mining sites allow the extraction of bentonite, clay, scoria, soil materials, peat, sand, or gravel. According to data provided by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in May of 2022, 27 openpit mining sites in Carter County have been permitted, of which 19 are gravel pit sites operated by the Carter County Road Department and three are operated by American Colloid Company (Montana Department of Environmental Quality, 2024).

The northern Black Hills bentonite mining district includes parts of Crook County, Wyoming, Carter County, Montana, and Butte County, South Dakota. The northern Black Hills district is an important source of commercial gel-forming sodium-type bentonite. Non-metallic mineral reserves of bentonite are found in the southeast portion of Carter County near Alzada (Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, 2022).

8.6. ENERGY

Table 8.4 shows the annual production of oil in Carter County from 2014 to 2023. During this time period, no natural gas was produced by wells located in Carter County.

Table 8.4 Carter County Oil Production (Montana Board of Oil & Gas Conservation, 2024)

Year	Oil (bbls)
2014	23,193
2015	16,161
2016	15,184
2017	13,137
2018	11,749
2019	13,890
2020	9,399
2021	12,996
2022	10,500

According to the U.S. Department of Energy’s National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the Wind Power Class for Carter County ranges from 2 - Marginal to 4 - Good (Bugh & Larson, 2018). There are currently no active or proposed wind energy projects in Carter County.

8.7. TIMBER

The timber industry in eastern Montana is located in Carter County in the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Additionally, some private timber is harvested each year. The timber industry statewide and in the entire northwestern United States has faced huge cutbacks in timber harvest and lumber mill closures. The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation foresters serving these counties provide information, technical assistance and encourage responsible utilization of timber resources (Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation, 2022).

8.8. CLIMATE AND SOILS

Average total precipitation and average total snowfall for Ekalaka is presented in Table 8.2. Figure 8.2 illustrates the annual total precipitation for Ekalaka from 2000 to 2023. Data was not available for 2007, 2013, or 2021. The mean annual total precipitation for Ekalaka is 17.21 inches. The maximum annual total precipitation was in 2011 with 25.90 inches and the minimum annual total precipitation was in 2002 with 11.29 inches.

Figure 8.2 Annual Total Precipitation for Ekalaka (National Weather Service, 2024)

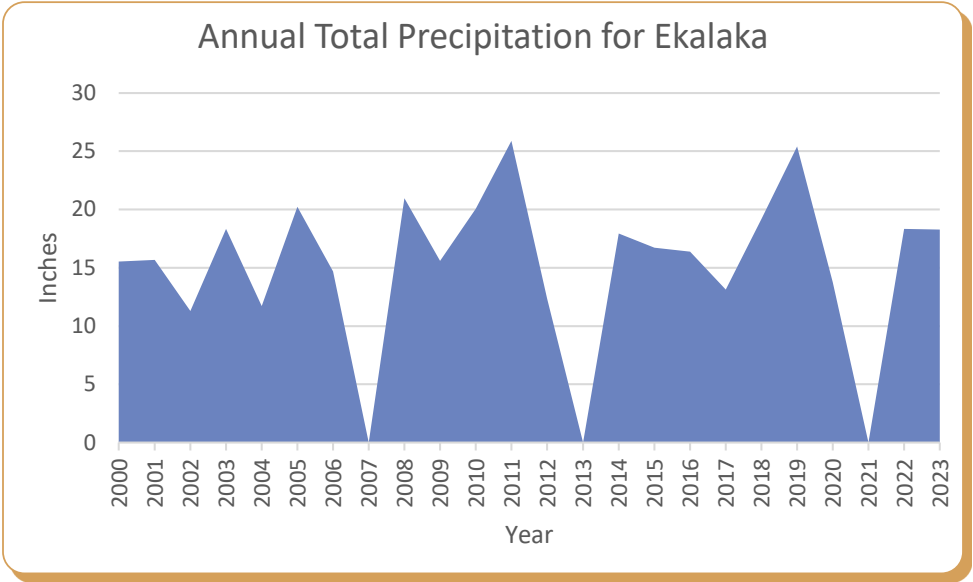
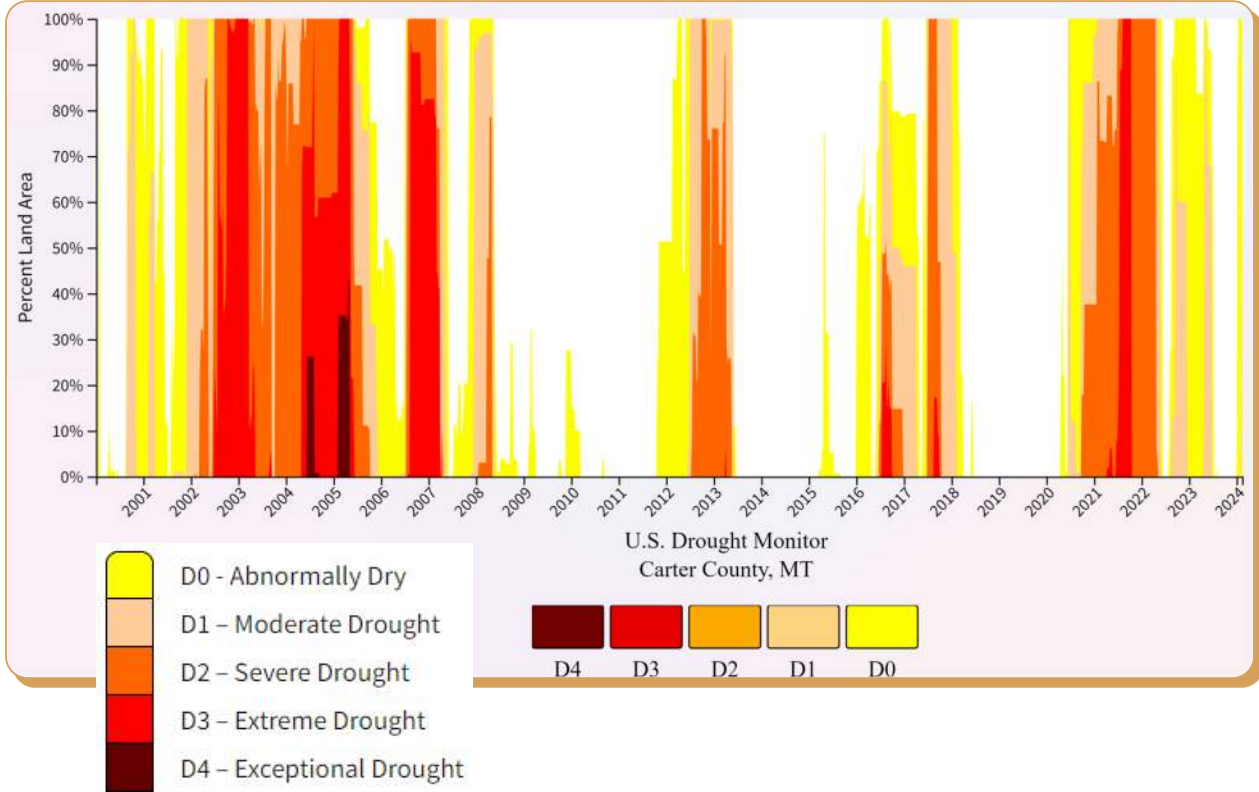


Figure 8.3 depicts the historical drought conditions for Carter County. The U.S. Drought Monitor is jointly produced by the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Carter County last experienced severe and extreme drought conditions in 2021 and 2022. The county has not experienced exceptional drought conditions since 2005.

Figure 8.3 Historical Drought Conditions for Carter County (National Drought Mitigation Center, 2024)



A web soil survey for Carter County was prepared by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Soil types comprising 1.0% or more of the county are listed in Table 8.5. Combined, these soil types comprise 54.0% of Carter County. Eapa loam, which makes up 4.3% of the soil in the county, consists of very deep, well drained soils. Neldore-Bascovy clays, which make up 3.6% of the soil in the county, consist of shallow, well drained soils. Gerdrum-Absher soils, which make up 2.8% of the soil in the county, also consist of very deep, well drained soils.

Table 8.5 Soil Types in Carter County (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2024)

Soil Type	Acres	Percent
Eapa loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes	92,463.5	4.3%
Neldore-Bascovy clays, 4 to 15 percent slopes	76,418.2	3.6%
Gerdrum-Absher complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	61,049.4	2.8%
Rock outcrop-Moyerson complex, 15 to 50 percent slopes	49,880.8	2.3%
Neldore clay, 4 to 15 percent slopes	46,778.8	2.2%
Orinoco-Yawdim silty clay loams, 4 to 15 percent slopes	46,268.2	2.2%
Marvan silty clay, warm, 2 to 8 percent slopes	46,144.9	2.2%
Archin-Absher complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	45,354.2	2.1%
Marvan silty clay, warm, 0 to 2 percent slopes	43,302.8	2.0%
Archin loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes	42,778.5	2.0%
Gerdrum clay loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes	41,684.9	1.9%
Creed-Gerdrum complex, 2 to 8 percent slopes	41,143.7	1.9%
Moyerson silty clay loam, 4 to 15 percent slopes	40,042.1	1.9%
Moyerson-Orinoco silty clay loams, 4 to 15 percent slopes	36,763.2	1.7%
Absher-Gerdrum complex, 0 to 4 percent slopes	35,521.4	1.6%
Vanda-Marvan complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes	30,183.5	1.4%
Delpoint-Cabbart complex, 8 to 15 percent slopes	29,530.6	1.4%
Havre loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	26,831.1	1.3%
Yamacall-Cabbart loams, 15 to 35 percent slopes	26,481.1	1.2%
Bickerdyke clay, 0 to 2 percent slopes	26,284.3	1.2%
Harlake silty clay loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	24,982.8	1.2%
Neldore-Volborg clays, 4 to 15 percent slopes	24,421.7	1.1%
Vaeda silty clay loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes	23,715.3	1.1%
Cabbart-Rock outcrop-Delpoint complex, 15 to 50 percent slopes	23,128.2	1.1%
Neldore-Rock outcrop complex, warm, 15 to 60 percent slopes	23,070.0	1.1%
Broadus-Ridge-Reeder complex, 8 to 25 percent slopes	22,900.3	1.1%
Gerdrum-Absher complex, 0 to 2 percent slopes	22,665.9	1.1%

Cabbart-Rock outcrop-Yawdim complex, 15 to 70 percent slopes	21,856.5	1.0%
Ethridge loam, 2 to 8 percent slopes	21,502.0	1.0%
Cabbart-Cambeth silt loams, 8 to 15 percent slopes	21,002.4	1.0%
Blacksheep-Twilight fine sandy loams, complex, 8 to 15 percent slopes	20,887.5	1.0%
Arsite clay, 0 to 8 percent slopes	20,421.5	1.0%
TOTAL	1,155,459.3	54.0%

8.9. ACCESS SITES

The majority (65%) of Carter County is privately owned while 35% is owned by the state and federal governments. As detailed in Table 4.1, the BLM owns 24% of Carter County and the Forest Service owns 4%. The Montana State Trust owns 7% of Carter County and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks owns less than 1%.

BLM land is scattered throughout the County but concentrated in the central and southern parts. Forest Service land is heavily concentrated along the Montana/South Dakota border with some areas scattered through the north central part of the County. Land owned by the Montana State Trust is located along the boundary between Carter County and Powder River County. The 10 acres owned by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks is located northeast of Ekalaka near the boundary between Carter County and Fallon County. See Figure 4.2 for details.

8.10. LOCAL RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

- **MCNAB POND AND CAMPGROUND** (approximately 9 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a campground and stocked fishing pond that contains crappie, bass, and rainbow trout)
- **CAPITOL ROCK NATURAL LANDMARK** (approximately 47 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a massive sandstone remnant that resembles the Capitol Building in Washington, DC)
- **TRI-POINT FIRE LOOKOUT TOWER** (approximately 30 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a 60-foot steel tower built in 1936)
- **MEDICINE ROCKS STATE PARK** (approximately 11 miles north of Ekalaka; a series of natural rock formations considered sacred by local Native American tribes)
- **EKALAKA PARK AND CAMPGROUND** (approximately 10 miles south of Ekalaka; located in the Ekalaka Hills, which consist of scenic drop-offs and cliff-edge views over the prairie)
- **CAMP NEEDMORE** (approximately 7 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp that now hosts 4-H and football camps, family reunions, hunters, and other visitors)

8.11. FUTURE TRENDS OR NEEDS

The use of land managed by state and federal agencies will continue to increase due to the popularity of outdoor recreation, changes in regulations, and wildlife management. These issues may create management challenges for agencies, given that any management changes often take an excessive amount of time due to required public processes and conflicts related to public land access.

8.12. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

GOAL 8.1	
Preserve the high quality of life and natural heritage of Carter County. Enhance the recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to Carter County.	
Objectives	Actions
Maintain the overall water quality of the major rivers and streams in Carter County and improve water availability to users along these water corridors.	Local government to enforce the design, construction and permitting regulations adopted by local, state and federal agencies that protect water quality and supply for new development or other activities. Include a public notification to conservation district and nearby landowners during the approval process.
	Carter County Planning Board to require land stewardship plans with major subdivision submittals that address such items as noxious weed control, wildlife, livestock grazing, other agricultural uses, and protection of water resources.
	Local government to utilize local agencies (MSU Extension) to educate landowners regarding best management practices to protect water quality.
	Local government to adopt standards for development along water corridors.
Ensure new developments have adequate water supplies while protecting the water rights of existing landowners.	Local government to monitor the water rights adjudication process and coordinate with agencies on strategies to address water rights.
	Local government to require new developments to demonstrate they have adequate water sources without negatively impacting existing uses and prohibit developments unless they satisfy this requirement.
Improve and maintain access to accessible public lands.	Local government to maintain communication with state and federal agencies for current and future access to public lands.
	Local government to support and encourage the dedication of recreation systems that are adjacent to, or continuations of, existing or planned parks, recreation areas, open space, trails, or public lands.

<p>Protect the high quality of life and natural heritage of Carter County, such as wildlife, scenic vistas, clean air, fossil, and cultural resources.</p>	<p>Local government to work with existing agencies to discourage development in areas with high natural resource value such as wildlife habitat and migration corridors, scenic areas, archeological sites, and paleontological sites.</p>
	<p>Local government to support the Carter County Museum's stewardship of paleontological and cultural heritage and ability to meet repository standards for state and federal agencies.</p>
	<p>Local government to coordinate development standards for sensitive lands such as floodplains and slopes with regulatory agencies that oversee these activities.</p>
	<p>Local government to coordinate with agencies that manage public lands on land planning issues and actively participate in planning efforts.</p>
	<p>Local government to work with other agencies to educate landowners on agricultural practices that promote conservation and wildlife values.</p>
	<p>Local government to provide information to landowners on private and non-profit efforts to protect important lands.</p>
	<p>Local government to enforce the design, construction, and permitting regulations adopted by local, state, and federal agencies that protect air quality and other natural or cultural resources.</p>
	<p>Local government to utilize maps and information that identify areas of sensitive lands and lands with high natural resource value to inform their decisions.</p>
	<p>Local government to utilize established relationships with agencies that set public lands policies to encourage the involvement of landowners in decision making process for public lands.</p>
	<p>Local government to develop gravel resources in a manner that minimizes impacts on nearby properties and roads.</p>
<p>Support recreational, cultural, and historical economic industries.</p>	<p>Local government, EPEDC, Chamber of Commerce to contribute to the strong outdoor recreation industry by marketing the abundance and availability the county has to provide.</p>
	<p>Local government, EPEDC, Chamber of Commerce, and the Carter County Museum to continue to preserve and highlight cultural and historical significance. Grant sources available to assist with this include Montana Historic Preservation grants and the Foundation for Montana History.</p>
	<p>Local government to support completion of Camp Needmore facility enhancements that comply with historical site regulations.</p>

9. COORDINATION WITH LOCAL JURISDICTIONS AND AGENCIES

Section 76-1-601(3)(g) MCA requires that a growth policy include a statement concerning how local governments will cooperate with other jurisdictional entities in implementing its growth policy. The Town of Ekalaka adopted its own amendment to the Carter County Growth Policy in July 2013. Therefore, that document is implemented as a separate policy area.

The County Land Planning Board has duties and responsibilities described in by-laws that outline the relationship of the Board to the respective governing bodies, meetings, membership, powers, and duties including their relationship with planning staff. In addition, this board is responsible for developing a Growth Policy for their jurisdiction.

Carter County does have subdivision regulations in place, which are in the process of being updated following legislative changes made in 2022. The Town of Ekalaka has also implemented subdivision regulations, which were adopted by the Town Council on December 9, 2015 with an effective date of January 9, 2016.

When a proposed subdivision is also proposed to be annexed into the town, the Town of Ekalaka must coordinate the subdivision review and annexation procedures to minimize duplication of hearings, reports, and other requirements whenever possible (refer to MCA 76-3-601 and 605).

Additionally, review and comment by public agencies, service providers, and utilities may be necessary for a subdivider to prepare a preliminary plat application that addresses the requirements of the Montana Subdivision and Platting Act (MSPA) and these regulations. Such review and comments may also be necessary for the Subdivision Administrator, Land Planning Board, and Town Council to adequately review a preliminary plat application (Town of Ekalaka, 2015).

Carter County's Resource Use Plan also guides proposed development efforts. The County's Resource Use Plan was completed in 2006 and is currently being updated. Further, state and federal agencies have the potential to impact resources and influence the use and development of land in Carter County. Agencies including the BLM, Forest Service, Montana State Trust, and Fish, Wildlife and Parks occupy 35% of the land in the county (see Chapter 4 of this document).

The Carter County Long Range Plan, authored by the USDA NRCS Ekalaka Field Office, states that "mutual problems and opportunities for the conservation, development, and use of public lands exist and are typically resolved through the cooperation of public land administrators, managers, and users." Further, the Long Range Plan notes that "the Carter County Conservation District and Ekalaka NRCS desire closer working relations with federal land administrators on all problems concerning public land in the hope that we can effectively partner to address similar resource concerns on adjacent/adjoining public and private lands" (Natural Resources Conservation Service, 2020).

10. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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

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

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

10.1. REGULATORY TOOLS

LOCAL REVIEW OF SUBDIVISIONS

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

§76-3-501 et. Seq. MCA requires local governments to establish subdivision regulations and outlines the minimum requirements for those regulations.

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

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

ZONING

Neither Carter County nor the Town of Ekalaka have Zoning Regulations in place, although the airspace around Ekalaka Airport is protected from obstructions as required by *Title 14 Code of Federal Regulations: Part 77 Safe, Efficient Use, and Preservation of the Navigable Airspace*. Zoning is a commonly used tool for implementing land use policy. Zoning describes the control by authority of the use of land and the buildings that may be placed there. Areas of land are divided by appropriate authorities into zones within which various uses are permitted.

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

Development Design Standards

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

Agricultural Zoning

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

Interim/Emergency Zoning

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

DECAY ORDINANCE

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

FLOODPLAIN REGULATIONS

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

CONSIDERATIONS FOR REGULATORY ENFORCEMENT

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

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM

A Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) is used as a budgeting and financial tool by the County to establish long term goals for maintaining, improving, or building

new public facilities. The document identifies specific projects, costs, priorities, timetables, and funding sources, and includes all public facilities owned or maintained by the local government. The importance of a CCIP for land use planning is the critical connection between where and when infrastructure is provided and what the desired land use pattern is for a community or neighborhood. It is recommended that a full CCIP be prepared every 10 years at a minimum to include a full study of the capital needs of the county/city/town.

Carter County completed a CCIP that was approved by the County Commissioners in 2015. This CCIP spanned the years 2016 through 2021.

IMPACT FEES

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

STATE AND FEDERAL GRANTS OR LOANS

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

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

Grant and loan opportunities commonly used by local governments include:

- **MONTANA COAL ENDOWMENT PROGRAM (MCEP):** planning and construction grants for infrastructure including bridges, water systems, and wastewater systems, solid waste management, and storm water management.
- **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) PROGRAM:** planning and construction grants for infrastructure, public facilities, housing, and economic development. CDBG eligibility for construction grants is tied to the benefit the projects will provide for low to moderate income individuals.
- **DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND CONSERVATION (DNRC) RENEWABLE RESOURCE GRANT AND LOAN (RRGL) PROGRAM:** planning and construction grants for public facility projects including drinking water, wastewater and solid waste development and improvement projects. Other renewable resource projects that have been funded include irrigation rehabilitation, dam repair, soil and water conservation, and forest enhancement.

- **MDT TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES (TA):** grants to improve access to alternative transportation routes along Montana’s highways. This can include sidewalks, trails, community gateway features, lighting, and historic rehabilitation.
- **USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT (RD):** planning and construction loans and grants for communities with fewer than 10,000 people. Grant amounts are dependent on Median Household Income.
- **STATE REVOLVING FUND (SRF):** low interest loans used to maintain and improve drinking water systems and water pollution control projects.
- **LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND:** grants that improve access to recreational opportunities and safeguard natural areas, water resources, and cultural heritage.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING AND TARGETED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISTRICTS

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

ANNUAL REVIEW

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

- Status of goals, objective and actions suggested in the Growth Policy.
- Recommendation/assessment of goals to be addressed in the following year.
- Evaluation of need to revise the Growth Policy.

CONDITIONS FOR REVISING THE GROWTH POLICY

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

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

PROCESS FOR REVISING THE GROWTH POLICY

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

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

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

Timeframe is limited to:

Ongoing or Ongoing as Opportunities Arise – indicates an action or activity that the County or other entities are already involved in or are encouraged to become involved in as circumstances, funding, or other opportunities arise.

- Near term (1-5 years)
- Mid-term (5-10 years)
- Long-term (>10 years)

CARTER COUNTY GROWTH POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation plan includes goals, objectives, an action plan, and a timeframe in which the community is planning to accomplish the defined objectives and actions. The following definitions apply:

1. **Goal (Eby, 2022)** – a desired outcome or result. A goal requires conceptual thinking and should align with the community’s vision for its future. Goals are unspecific and are difficult to measure – they are broad in scope. Some may be feasible but are often aspirational. Goals give the team a vision, focus, and a sense of purpose.
2. **Objective (Eby, 2022)** – specific actions to move toward a common goal. Objectives require strategic thinking, problem-solving, and creativity. They are specific, tangible, and easy to measure and quantify. Objectives are achievable, allowing communities to make progress toward achieving goals.
3. **Action** – identifiable projects and steps to achieve objectives. The action plan assigns people and resources that can help carry out the projects and steps.
4. **Timeframe** – an ongoing action or activity the community is currently doing that the Growth Policy encourages it to continue to do. Near term is within one year, mid-term within 5 years, long-term is an objective that will likely take more than 5 years to accomplish.

The plan should be reviewed and updated on a yearly basis and actions and timeframes should be adjusted accordingly. Any accomplishments should be celebrated.

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
POPULATION				
Sustainable population growth that maintains a rural lifestyle with growth that produces stable, vital communities.	Plan for 1% to 2% annual growth (about 14-30 people per year based on future trends).	Utilize the Chamber of Commerce and Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation (EPEDC) to market quality of life factors that attract new residents.	Near term	
		Support local government efforts such as addressing blight or other public safety issues to build community values that will attract engaged community members.	Mid-term	
Identify areas in Carter County that are desirable for growth and target capital improvements for these areas.	Encourage in-fill developments in and near town centers to prevent urban sprawl and preserve open space and agricultural land.	Ekalaka to utilize subdivision and zoning regulations to encourage in-fill developments.	Ongoing	
		Towns and populated unincorporated areas seek to provide adequate infrastructure (water, sewer, storm) in areas suitable for growth. This may include acquisition of funding for projects. Common sources for infrastructure funding include the Montana Department of Commerce, DNRC, and USDA Rural Development.	Ongoing	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
Provide the means to maintain the current population and attract new residents who represent the future of the community.	Maintain and improve infrastructure and services that support older adults or retirees and allow them to remain in the community.	Support housing development and upgrades that provide accessible and attractive housing options for seniors utilizing funding from sources that may include CDBG, HOME, or Rural Development.	Mid-term	
		Work with EPEDC to encourage business and services for older adults (i.e., healthcare and social centers). Utilize funding from sources that may include CDBG and Rural Development.	Near term	
	Maintain and improve infrastructure and services that support maternal, family, and children's services.	Support housing development and upgrades that provide affordable housing options utilizing funding from sources that may include CDBG, HOME, or Rural Development.	Mid-term	
		Work with EPEDC to encourage business and services for families (i.e., healthcare, schools, childcare centers, and recreational facilities). Utilize funding from sources that may include CDBG and Rural Development.	Mid-term	
		Local government to actively engage young adults in community leadership positions.	Ongoing	
		Local government to work with local agencies (youth groups, schools, museum, and library) to promote activities, educational programs, and entertainment for youth.	Near term	
		Design facilities and services to accommodate people of all ages and abilities.	Local government to ensure ADA access to facilities and services, including seeking funding from programs that assist with accessibility (MDT TA, CDBG, Housing Rehab, or CDBG Public Facilities).	Near term

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Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
LAND USE				
Protect the natural environment/heritage of Carter County as growth occurs.	Allow development that is compatible with the natural heritage of the area and supports and protects the natural resources, ecosystem, and recreational opportunities in the county/town.	Local government and other stakeholders, including potential developers, actively participate in planning efforts by state/federal agencies (BLM, FWP, or USFS).	Ongoing	
		Local government and planning boards consult with the public, non-profit and resource management agencies within the area of proposed development early in review stages.	Ongoing	
	Encourage the enhancement of public spaces within Carter County and its communities.	Local government actively encourages state and federal agencies to invest in the enhancement of public spaces.	Near term	
		Local government seeks resources and funding to build or improve recreational opportunities within the county, such as hiking trails, ATV trails, shooting ranges, etc.	Mid-term	
Preserve agricultural land and promote an environment for successful agricultural operations.	Encourage development in areas that are not in agricultural production.	Local government to utilize right-to-farm protections in Montana Code. MCA 76-2-901. Agricultural activities -- legislative finding and purpose. (1) The legislature finds that agricultural lands and the ability and right of farmers and ranchers to produce a safe, abundant, and secure food and fiber supply have been the basis of economic growth and development of all sectors of Montana's economy. In order to sustain Montana's valuable farm economy and land bases associated with it, farmers and ranchers must be encouraged and have the right to stay in farming. (2) It is therefore the intent of the legislature to protect agricultural activities from governmental zoning and nuisance ordinances.	Ongoing	
		Identify productive agricultural lands and target for agricultural preservation programs.	Near term	
		Coordinate with state and federal agencies to promote sustainable agricultural practices.	Near term	
		Provide information regarding conservation easements and other incentives to preserve agricultural land. Encourage activities that meet this goal.	Near term	
		Local government to coordinate land use policies and infrastructure development to preserve water resources used by agricultural, recreational, municipal, and other beneficial users.	Near term	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
Development that is compatible with existing land uses, protects small town character, and minimizes negative impacts.	Establish or maintain policies and regulations that promote compatibility with existing land uses, protect small town character, and minimize negative impacts.	Local government to review development standards to determine if they are adequate to meet health and safety concerns.	Near term	
		Local government to identify areas that are most appropriate for growth within the unincorporated portions of the growth policy planning area.	Near term	
		Local government to coordinate development review with different local, state, and federal agencies that are involved in various aspects of development or may be affected by new development.	Near term	
		Local government to work with state agencies and landowners to identify Brownfields sites and provide education on programs to clean-up contaminated properties.	Mid-term	
		Maintain updated subdivision regulations to reflect changes in state requirements or land use patterns.	Near term	
		Maintain state mandated Buildings for Lease or Rent regulations.	Near term	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
HOUSING				
Meet housing needs for all ages, incomes, and special needs groups.	Expand housing stock to meet the need for Low to Moderate Income (LMI) families and first-time homebuyers.	Utilize housing organizations to seek resources to improve housing quality, condition, and availability and support efforts to build affordable homes and rentals, including single family homes.	Mid-term	
		Local government to support housing developers with access to grant and loan funding for multi-family and single-family housing.	Mid-term	
		Local government/planning board to review regulations to eliminate barriers to multi-family or affordable housing options.	Near term	
	Encourage development/improvement of affordable homes and rentals to meet the needs of a growing workforce, including single family homes.	Conduct a housing needs assessment in Carter County and determine potential for rehabilitation grants.	Near term	
	Develop a variety of housing types to meet the needs of the changing population.	Promote and encourage the use of commercial and residential structures, including historic preservation of buildings, to develop rental units in currently unused spaces (i.e., above businesses, within unused government facilities).	Mid-term	
		Local government to exercise policies to promote development of multi-family rental units in incorporated area where infrastructure and services are readily available.	Near term	
		Target expansion and development of housing for seniors, such as assisted living centers and active retirement communities.	Near term	
		Support land use policies that will encourage redevelopment of land for housing purposes.	Near term	
	Affordable housing for all populations.	Support grant and loan applications for the rehabilitation of existing housing designated for LMI and senior residents. Work with housing agencies and lenders to promote programs for home improvement and rehabilitation.	Mid-term	

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Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT				
Economic development that supports the agricultural sector of the economy and existing businesses.	Economic development activities that help sustain agriculture and existing businesses.	Work with EPEDC, MSU Extension, and other agricultural agencies to provide resources that target value-added agriculture or economic development.	Near term	
		Work with Chamber of Commerce and other programs to support entrepreneur training and programs.	Near term	
		Encourage study and training activities that identify existing needs of the community and how those needs might be filled by local businesses expanding their offering of goods and services.	Mid-term	
		Utilize EPEDC for business retention efforts, which includes identifying local business needs for resources and training and encouraging local job creation.	Near term	
		Work with EPEDC, Made in Montana, Grown in Montana, and Chamber of Commerce to support local businesses and promote niche markets for local products.	Near term	
		Utilize EPEDC to coordinate partnerships with landowners, finance institutions, and public and non-profit sector to develop programs to support family farms.	Near term	
		Ensure that the necessary services and infrastructure are maintained and expanded when necessary to encourage the continuation of local farming and ranching.	Ongoing	
		Promote development within Ekalaka, existing unincorporated communities, and other areas planned for development where public facilities and infrastructure are available, and away from rural areas and areas used exclusively for agriculture.	Ongoing	
		Local government to encourage development of standards that protect agricultural activities, including but not limited to spraying chemicals, burning fields, and use of machinery at any hour; control of domestic animals; maintenance of agricultural fencing; and protection of agricultural water user facilities, ditches, and water rights.	Near term	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
Diversify the economic base with industries that do not threaten the rural lifestyle and/or create a strain on public services.	Work with economic development organizations to attract industries that align with the Carter County rural lifestyle and do not create a strain on public services.	Target economic development efforts towards clean industries or industries that use sustainable development techniques.	Near term	
		Coordinate with local, regional and state economic development programs.	Ongoing	
		Cultivate new economy businesses such as telecommunications, alternative energy, internet, and home office workers.	Near term	
		Develop tourism and heritage resources, such as the museum, to capture more tourist dollars.	Ongoing	
		Promote opportunities for economic development based on recreational activities.	Ongoing	
	Set goals and policies that encourage economic development while protecting the infrastructure and environment in Carter County.	Local government to set policies that minimize environmental impacts of resource extraction industries.	Near term	
		Local government to develop land use and public infrastructure policies that coordinate with economic development.	Near term	
		Local government to include performance standards for potential nuisances from commercial and industrial development within regulations.	Near term	
	Address workforce needs of the community.	County and Town governments collaborate to support economic development projects including infrastructure, community amenities, and housing for workforce.	Ongoing	
		Maintain County and Town budgets at a level that will support infrastructure, such as water, sewer, roads, and bridges, and maintain a safe, healthy, and attractive environment such as fire and police protection and weed management.	Ongoing	
		Support expanded broadband and cellular service infrastructure within the county.	Near term	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
LOCAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC FACILITIES				
Serve the public health and social service needs of all residents in Carter County (more health care providers and educational opportunities surrounding public health issues).	Provide public health and social services that promote the health and welfare of Carter County residents.	Support the goals and objectives of the Carter County Community Health Needs Assessment.	Currently underway	
		Local government to support the social service providers within the county, providing public assistance, child and family services, and senior services.	Ongoing	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
Maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed to serve County residents of all ages, incomes, and special needs groups.	Systematically plan and budget for capital improvements within the Town and County to efficiently maintain and upgrade public infrastructure as needed.	Local government to prepare and utilize the Comprehensive Capital Improvements Plan (CCIP) for Carter County and Ekalaka. Commission/Councils to review and update CCIP annually as needs change.	Near term	
		Local government to support upgrades of public facilities for ADA compliance.	Near term	
		Carter County to support the Town of Ekalaka in their efforts to plan, fund, and build water, sewer, roads, and utilities through state and federal funding mechanisms.	Ongoing	
		Carter County Planning Board and local government to encourage leveraging additional resources for infrastructure through private/public partnerships.	Near term	
		Carter County Planning Board and local government to consider policies that require developers to pay a proportional share for infrastructure upgrades and expansion.	Ongoing	
	Maintain the existing county roads and bridges efficiently, economically, and based on standard criteria.	Local government to follow the recommendations for maintenance and improvements to the County/Town transportation systems outlined in the CCIP.	Ongoing	
		Local government to stay apprised of funding opportunities and secure financial assistance as available from programs that may help leverage local funds in the maintenance of county roads, bridges, and pedestrian facilities (i.e. MCEP, FLAP, TA, etc.)	Ongoing	
		County/Town staff and officials to communicate with MDT personnel on a regular basis to take advantage of MDT road, bridge, and transportation alternative programs.	Ongoing	
		County Commissioners have addressed transportation impacts from commercial/industrial activity and will continue to assess the need to negotiate with developers or other industries doing business in the county when significant impacts are anticipated.	Ongoing	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
NATURAL RESOURCES AND RECREATION				
<p>Preserve the high quality of life and natural heritage of Carter County.</p> <p>Enhance the recreational opportunities for residents and visitors to Carter County.</p>	<p>Maintain the overall water quality of the major rivers and streams in Carter County and improve water availability to users along these water corridors.</p>	<p>Local government to enforce the design, construction and permitting regulations adopted by local, state and federal agencies that protect water quality and supply for new development or other activities. Include a public notification to conservation district and nearby landowners during the approval process.</p>	Ongoing	
		<p>Carter County Planning Board to require land stewardship plans with major subdivision submittals that address such items as noxious weed control, wildlife, livestock grazing, other agricultural uses, and protection of water resources.</p>	Ongoing	
		<p>Local government to utilize local agencies (MSU Extension) to educate landowners regarding best management practices to protect water quality.</p>	Ongoing	
		<p>Local government to adopt standards for development along water corridors.</p>	Near term	
	<p>Ensure new developments have adequate water supplies while protecting the water rights of existing landowners.</p>	<p>Local government to monitor the water rights adjudication process and coordinate with agencies on strategies to address water rights.</p>	Near term	
		<p>Local government to require new developments to demonstrate they have adequate water sources without negatively impacting existing uses and prohibit developments unless they satisfy this requirement.</p>	Ongoing	
	<p>Protect the high quality of life and natural heritage of Carter County, such as wildlife, scenic vistas, clean air, fossil, and cultural resources.</p>	<p>Local government to work with existing agencies to discourage development in areas with high natural resource value such as wildlife habitat and migration corridors, scenic areas, archeological sites, and paleontological sites.</p>	Near term	
		<p>Local government to support the Carter County Museum's stewardship of paleontological and cultural heritage and ability to meet repository standards for state and federal agencies.</p>	Ongoing	
		<p>Local government to coordinate development standards for sensitive lands such as floodplains and slopes with regulatory agencies that oversee these activities.</p>	Near term	
		<p>Local government to coordinate with agencies that manage public lands on land planning issues and actively participate in planning efforts.</p>	Near term	

CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

Goal	Objective	Action (include resources and who is responsible)	Timeframe (ongoing, near term, mid-term, long-term)	Date Accomplished
		Local government to work with other agencies to educate landowners on agricultural practices that promote conservation and wildlife values.	Ongoing	
		Local government to provide information to landowners on private and non-profit efforts to protect important lands.	Near term	
		Local government to enforce the design, construction, and permitting regulations adopted by local, state, and federal agencies that protect air quality and other natural or cultural resources.	Ongoing	
		Local government to utilize maps and information that identify areas of sensitive lands and lands with high natural resource value to inform their decisions.	Near term	
		Local government to utilize established relationships with agencies that set public lands policies to encourage the involvement of landowners in decision making process for public lands.	Ongoing	
		Local government to develop gravel resources in a manner that minimizes impacts on nearby properties and roads.	Ongoing	
		Improve and maintain access to accessible public lands.	Local government to maintain communication with state and federal agencies for current and future access to public lands.	Ongoing
	Local government to support and encourage the dedication of recreation systems that are adjacent to, or continuations of, existing or planned parks, recreation areas, open space, trails, or public lands.		Ongoing	
	Support recreational, cultural, and historical economic industries.	Local government, EPEDC, Chamber of Commerce to contribute to the strong outdoor recreation industry by marketing the abundance and availability the county has to provide.	Ongoing	
		Local government, EPEDC, Chamber of Commerce, and the Carter County Museum to continue to preserve and highlight cultural and historical significance. Grant sources available to assist with this include Montana Historic Preservation grants and the Foundation for Montana History.	Ongoing	
		Local government to support completion of Camp Needmore facility enhancements that comply with historical site regulations.	Ongoing	

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**Appendix A:
Growth Policy Fact Sheet**

**Carter County, Montana
Growth Policy
2024**

Understand the Growth Policy

Know the key issues involved

Have your say in the outcome



Carter County Growth Policy Update

Envisioning the County's future and working to achieve it rather than just reacting to change and dealing with it from one short-range, quick-fix solution to another as events occur.

Project Overview

Carter County Commissioners, in an effort to address the most critical issues facing the County now and in the near future, have authorized the County Planning Board to develop a Growth Policy (or Comprehensive Plan).

What is a Growth Policy?

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan. It evaluates existing community conditions and sets goals for housing, land use, economic development, local services, public safety, natural resources, transportation, and other unique characteristics and features of the community.

A Growth Policy isn't a regulation or ordinance, but it serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

Why develop a Growth Policy in a County with little growth?

Change will happen. Whether that means growth or decline in population and resources, both require a plan to address a variety of issues within the County. The 1999 Montana Legislature changed the terms "master plan" and "comprehensive plan" to "growth policy". The terms are now synonymous under Montana statute. 76-1-601 through 76-1-606, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) establishes minimum requirements for Growth Policies, although local governments still have the option of deciding whether to prepare and adopt Growth Policies for their jurisdictions.

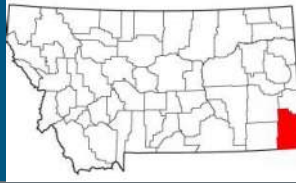
How do I get involved?

Contact Robie Culver or Kathy Thompson, Growth Policy Consultants at 406.442.8594 or rculver@seaeng.com and kthompson@seaeng.com or Melissa Schwede, Carter County Commission Clerk at 406.775.8749 or mschwede@cartercounty.us.

View information on the Project Website at www.carter.stahlyprojects.com.

Attend upcoming Public Meetings. Watch for announcements in the newspaper or on the County's website.





What are the advantages to having a Growth Policy?

- **Maintains community values** - preserves cultural and historical values, helps maintain the character of the community
- **Makes safer communities** - sets standards and promotes projects that improve infrastructure and services (roads, bridges, water resources, sewer systems, solid waste, fire and emergency services, health facilities)
- **Promotes affordable housing** - addresses challenges to safe and affordable housing for area residents
- **Saves money** - identifies growth patterns that minimize the cost to provide local services and infrastructure
- **Builds community** - facilitates greater understanding of issues
- **Attracts business** - creates a more attractive and well-planned community
- **Provides funding opportunities** - elevates community management in the eyes of funding agencies

What are key issues the Growth Policy will focus on?

While statute requires certain elements to be addressed in the Growth Policy and the Planning Board has identified some key issues, **residents and stakeholders in Carter County have an opportunity to identify additional areas of concern.**

LAND USE

Analysis of how land is used (residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, public, transportation) and direction on future use or constraints for future development.

POPULATION

Projections to help local government estimate type and quantity of public facilities and services required in the future. Analysis of population characteristics to help the community prepare for events, such as decrease in school enrollments or an increase in the elderly population.

HOUSING

Determine type, size, location, quantity, and quality of housing in the community. How will housing options affect land use and employment, as well as health, recreation, transportation, and public facilities? Produce an implementation plan for meeting local housing needs.

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

Analyze income and employment information to reflect the County's current economic situation. Analysis will help influence decisions about land area for new businesses, transportation networks, infrastructure (water and sewer), and residential development.

LOCAL SERVICES

Fire protection, law enforcement, water and sewer service, public health, education, library, social services, parks and recreation, utilities, other governmental or non-governmental services considered of value to the community. How are we doing? What can be better?

PUBLIC FACILITIES

Roads, streets, bridges, buildings, public infrastructure, and other County facilities. What capital needs are most important?

NATURAL RESOURCES

Physical and environmental characteristics and constraints evaluation. How will these affect land use, economic development, and health and safety issues related to construction? Includes inventory of sand and gravel resources and their compatibility with existing and future development.

RECREATIONAL ACCESS

Examine the role of recreational opportunities in the County. Determine how growth of the industry might affect land use, natural resources, and public facilities.



**Appendix B:
Community Survey**

Carter County Growth Policy Survey

Thank you for your interest in the Carter County Growth Policy. The results of this survey will help set priorities to update the Growth Policy. Please complete the survey below and email it to the Carter County Commission Clerk at: mschwede@cartercounty.us. You may also drop the survey off at the Commissioners' Office at 214 Park Street, Ekalaka, MT or mail it to:

Carter County
PO Box 315
Ekalaka, MT 59324

The survey is also available online at: www.carter.stahlyprojects.com

Please return by April 30th, 2024.

Please provide the zip code of your permanent residence: _____

General

1. Why do you choose to live in Carter County (check all that apply)?

- Lifestyle/Quality of Life
- Recreational opportunities
- Low population/Sense of community
- School
- Business/employment opportunities
- Job/remote work
- Public safety/safe environment – low crime/community safety
- Other: _____

Land Use

1. What activities affect land use in a way that may affect your livelihood or way of life (use a + or - to indicate positive/negative impacts).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural Resource (oil, gas, mining) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational (access to public lands for recreation) | <input type="checkbox"/> Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy Industrial (processing, manufacturing) |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Open Space |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Sand and Gravel Resources |

2. Carter County currently does not have zoning. Should Carter County consider countywide zoning?

- Yes
- No

3. Are there areas of the County where residential development should be promoted (check all that apply)?

- Within currently populated areas
- In rural areas
- Other: _____

4. Are there areas of the County where commercial development should be promoted (check all that apply)?

- Within currently populated areas
- In rural areas
- Other: _____

5. Are there areas of the County you feel are unsuitable for growth?

Yes

Where: _____

No

6. If a large-scale industry (wind farm, solar farm, hog farm, feed lot, etc.) were planning to develop in Carter County or from a visible location near a well-used travel way, do you think the County should regulate the location or building of such a development to mitigate potential detrimental aesthetic value?

Yes

Comments:

No

Population

1. Would you like to see population growth occur in the County or in your community?

Yes

Comments:

No

2. Based on current population demographics, is there a need for additional services related to youth or adults of child-bearing age (i.e. maternal health care, childcare, school expansion) in the County or in your community?

Yes

Comments:

No

The population trend from 2020 to 2040 shows the largest growth in the age groups 50-54 and 80-84 years with a decrease in those 30-34 and 65-69 years.

3. Based on projected population demographics, is there a need for additional aging services (i.e. health care, nursing home, assisted living) in the County or in your community?

Yes

Comments:

No

Housing

1. Does the County or your community need additional affordable and/or starter housing for lower income families or senior citizens in the area?

Yes

Comments:

No

2. Does the County or your community need additional housing?

Yes

Comments:

No

3. Is there a need for assisted living facilities for elderly or disabled individuals in the County or your community?

Yes

Comments:

No

4. Are there adequate long-term rental units available in your community?

Yes

Comments:

No

3. Are there services that the County does not provide that you feel are important to residents of the County and should be provided? (i.e., rural high-speed internet, county-owned water and sewer, etc.)

- Yes Comments:
 No

Public Facilities

1. Please rank the County managed facilities you feel are most important (1 most important; 12 least important).

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Roads/Streets | <input type="checkbox"/> County Shops |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridges | <input type="checkbox"/> Library |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Courthouse | <input type="checkbox"/> Community Centers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior Center | <input type="checkbox"/> Law Enforcement Center |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire Hall/EMS | <input type="checkbox"/> Fairgrounds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Airport | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | |

2. Do you feel the County adequately provides and maintains public facilities?

- Yes Comments:
 No

3. Are there facilities that the County does not own or manage that you feel would benefit the residents of the County? (i.e., clinic, park, recreation facilities, refuse site, cemetery, etc.)

- Yes Comments:
 No

Natural Resources

1. What do you consider to be the most important issues related to the County's natural resources (check all that apply)?

- Protection of water bodies
 Fish and wildlife management
 Wildland-Urban Interface (defensible space and water supply)
 Natural resource development (i.e., mining, energy, wildlife habitat, block management, sand/gravel)
Comments:

2. Should the County promote the development of natural resources to boost the local economy?

- Yes Comments:
 No

Recreational Access

1. Are the recreational opportunities in Carter County adequate?

- Yes
 No

2. What additional facilities should be pursued by the County to promote recreational access? (i.e., improved roads, etc. to established hunting/fishing accesses, camping, etc.)

3. Is recreation in Carter County that is promoted by other government agencies (i.e., Forest Service, BLM, FWP, etc.) causing impacts that should be addressed by the County?

Yes

Comments:

No

Additional Issues You Believe the County Should Consider in the Growth Policy:

If you wish to receive further notifications about the development of the Growth Policy, please provide the following information:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone Number _____

Email Address _____

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the survey!

Carter County Growth Policy Survey

Results as of 05/02/24

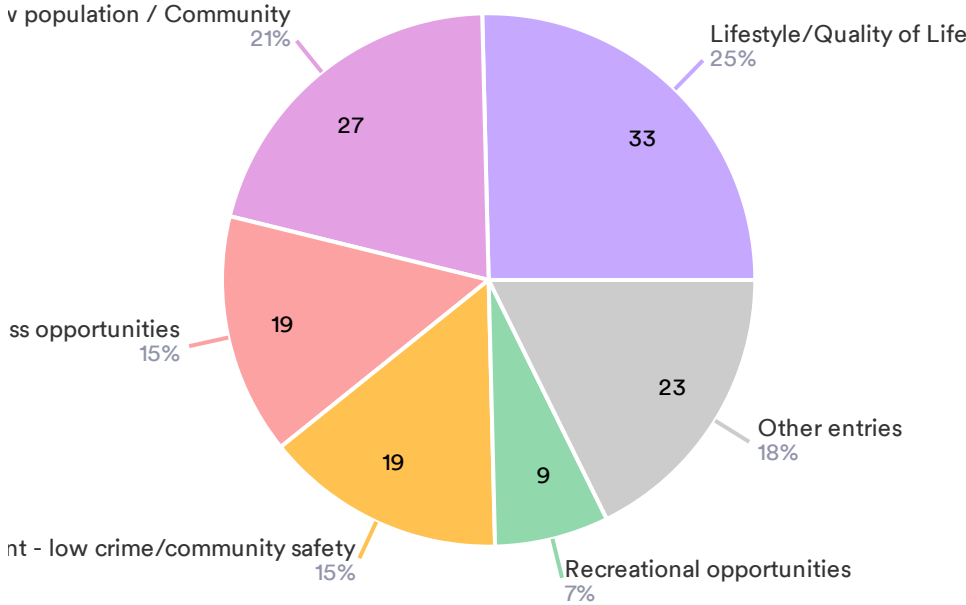
What is your zip code?

42 Responses

Data	Responses
59324	33
59311	6
59102	1
00000	1
59319	1

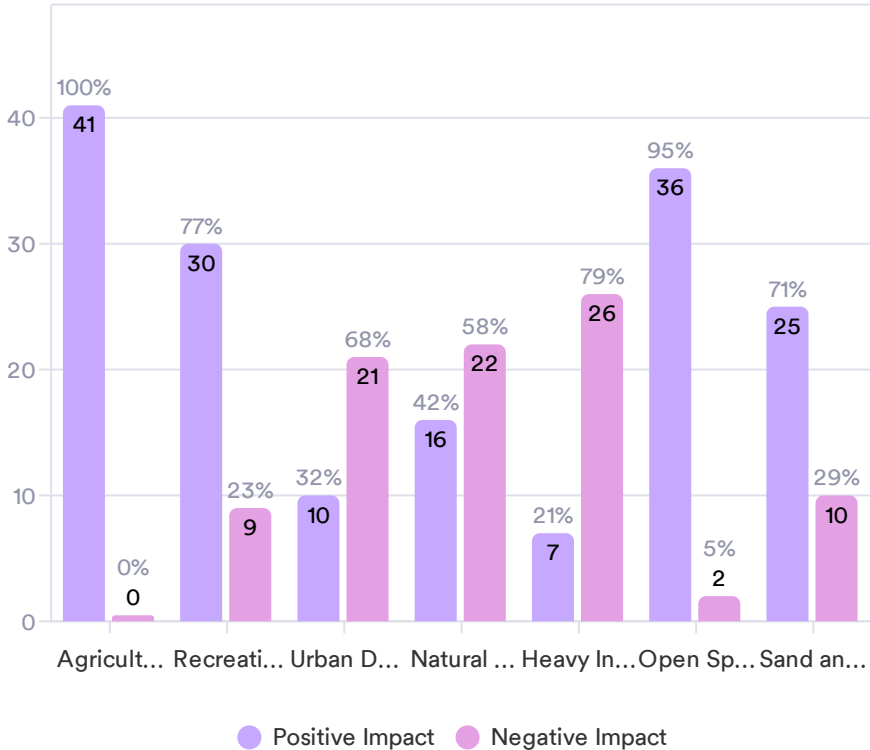
Why do you choose to live in Carter County (check all that applies)?

130 Responses



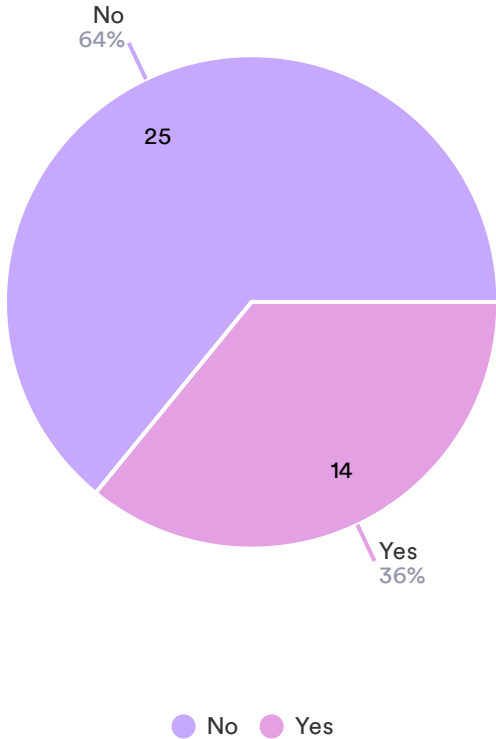
What activities affect land use in a way that may affect your livelihood or way of life (mark whether the impact is positive or negative).

42 Responses



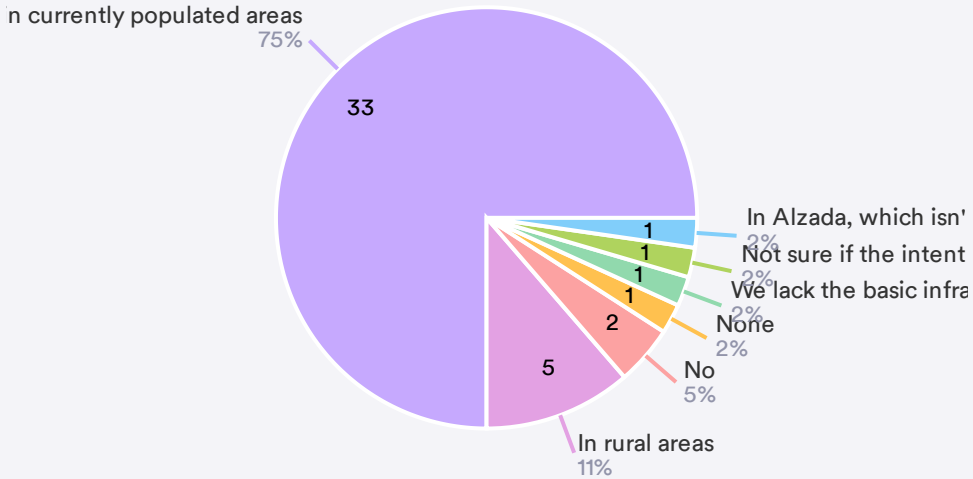
Carter County currently does not have zoning. Should Carter County consider county-wide zoning?

39 Responses- 3 Empty



Are there areas of the County where residential development should be promoted (check all that apply)?

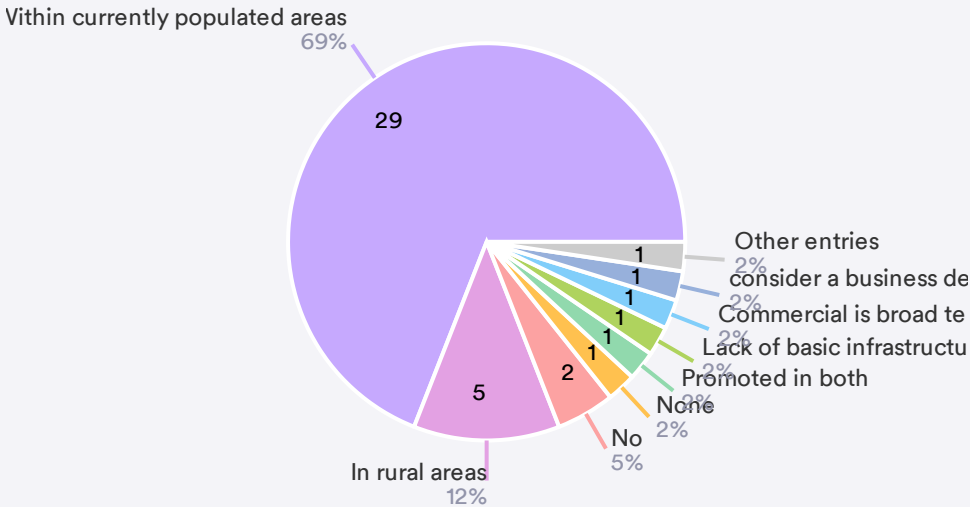
44 Responses- 2 Empty



- Within currently populated areas
- In rural areas
- No
- None
- We lack the basic infrastructure to grow
- Not sure if the intent of promotion would be ~ impacts to infrastructure and unintentional consequences
- In Alzada, which isn't exactly populated. Currently and historically the county govern...

Are there areas of the County where commercial development should be promoted (check all that apply)?

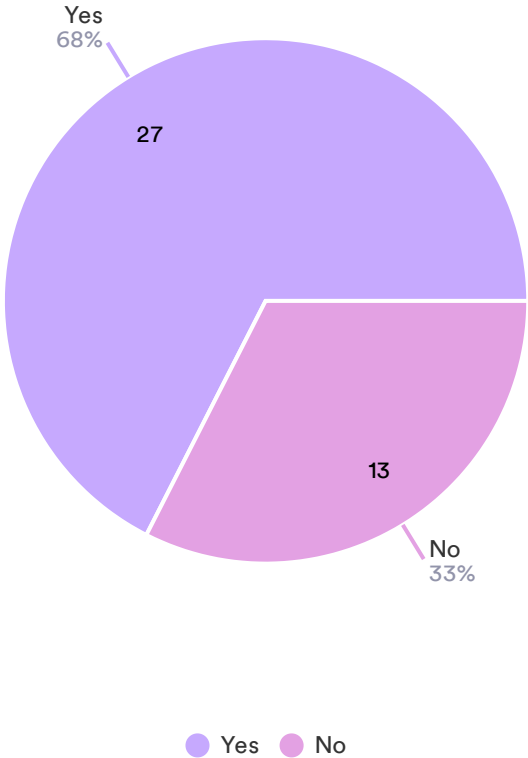
42 Responses- 4 Empty



- Within currently populated areas
- In rural areas
- No
- None
- Promoted in both
- Lack of basic infrastructure to grow
- Commercial is broad term ~ consideration of impacting the why & how people live...
- consider a business development area with specific targeted industries and adequate infrastructure
- Other entries

Are there areas of the County you feel are unsuitable for growth?

40 Responses- 2 Empty



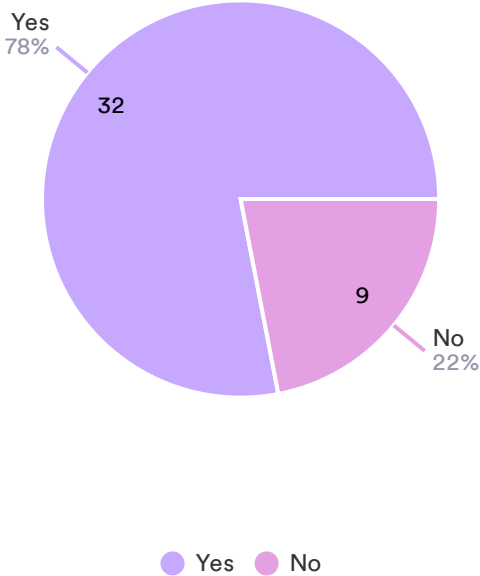
Where:

20 Responses- 22 Empty

Data	Responses
Rural	2
The proposed Snowy River Co2 Sequestration site	1
We are rural community. We do not need to be developed for the benefit of large corporations to rape our already scarce resources.	1
Agricultural Areas and near Forest Service/State Parks	1
Middle of someone's property.	1
Everywhere outside of city limits	1
Forested areas	1
Agricultural land	1
Other entries	11

If a large-scale industry (wind farm, solar farm, hog farm, feed lot, etc.) were planning to develop in Carter County or from a visible location near a well-used travel way, do you think the County should regulate the location or building of such a development to mitigate potential detrimental aesthetic value?

41 Responses- 1 Empty



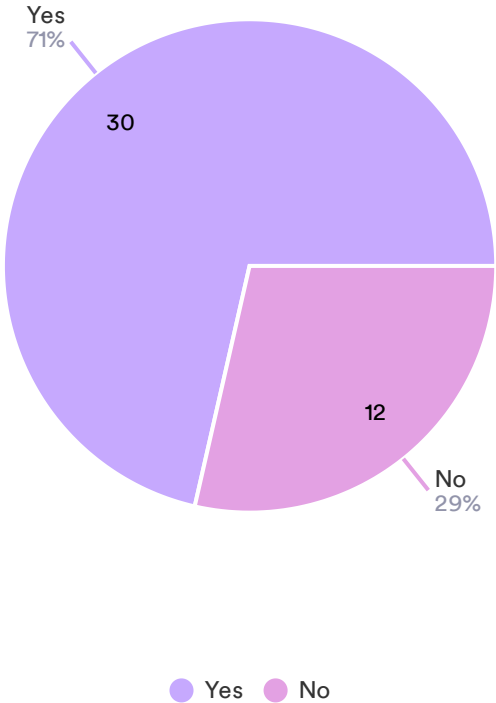
Comments:

14 Responses- 28 Empty

Data	Responses
Should regulate the Snowy River Co2 Sequestration site for ruining pristine land.	1
For a wind or solar farm	1
We don't want wind power in Carter County. We don't need the energy or the detrimental affects it will have on our ag and wildlife lands.	1
It would depend in what large scale industry is involved. If it were a wind farm or solar farm, I would feel more comfortable allowing them access to our land and community. If it were an ecologically dubious practice like hog farms or feed lot, I dont feel that would make positive change in Carter County.	1
Yes, but this should depend on the kind of development as well.	1
Not for view, for smell. Hog farms and feed lots stink.	1
"progress" is not what Carter County needs.	1

Would you like to see population growth occur in the County or in your community?

42 Responses



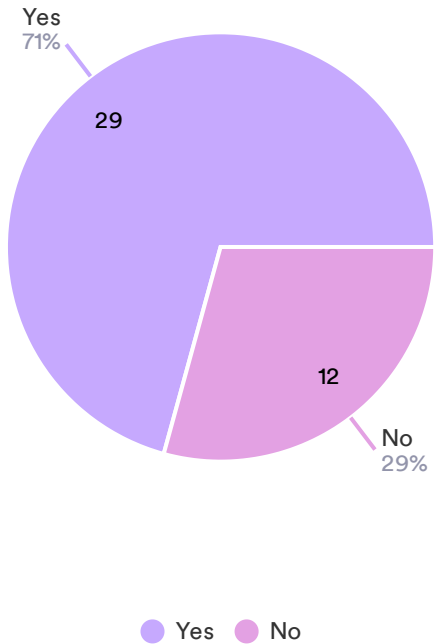
Comments:

12 Responses- 30 Empty

Data	Responses
If I wanted to live in a populated area I would move to one. Keep Carter county as is!	1
We need space in Montana for agriculture. Not every area on our great nation should be developed.	1
Only enough to support out community and keep our small town values and traditions	1
Small growth, including businesses for main Street and more students for the school. Not huge growth of 5,000 people! Based on cur	1
There's no housing available here.	1
Could increase tax revenue	1
in rural areas	1
on a small scale (our low population density attracts hunters, tourists & site seers)	1
Other entries	4

Based on current population demographics, is there a need for additional services related to youth or adults of child-bearing age (i.e. maternal health care, childcare, school expansion) in the County or in your community?

41 Responses- 1 Empty

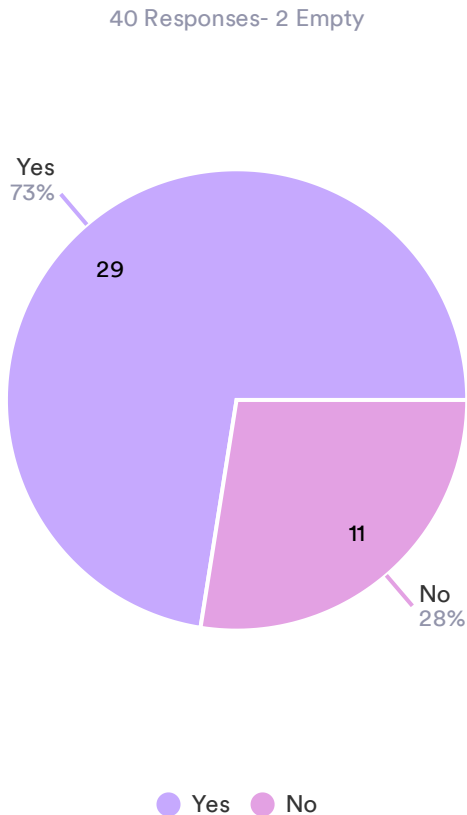


Comments:

15 Responses- 27 Empty

Data	Responses
Need another daycare!!	1
Absolutely. After school programs, youth center, oB Doctor a pediatric Doctor, speech therapy occupational therapy, counselors.	1
Entertainment	1
Childcare....not paid for by taxpayers	1
Daycare and youth programs would very beneficial	1
there needs to be something for the teenagers to do besides drinking	1
Childcare, but let the free market fill the void	1
Prevention health services; behavioral/mental health in person and telehealth	1
Other entries	7

Based on projected population demographics, is there a need for additional aging services (i.e. health care, nursing home, assisted living) in the County or in your community?



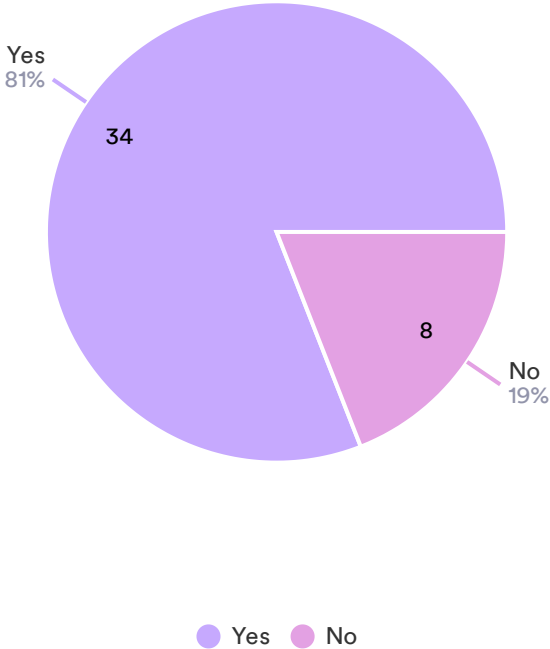
Comments:

20 Responses- 22 Empty

Data	Responses
Assisted living would benefit our area	1
This is a nation wide problem not exclusively a rural issue. We need to build on resources that we already have.	1
Assisted living, in home care services	1
We need assisted living beyond what the nursing home can provide. It is too expensive to put people in the nursing home if they only need assisted living care.	1
Yes. Affordable housing ON THE GROUND FLOOR. Current "senior" apartments are located in a split-level building.	1
Theres a brand new hospital and rest home!!	1
Not supervised by County Commissioners or DMHA	1
An Assisted Living facility would be very beneficial	1

Does the County or your community need additional affordable and/or starter housing for lower income families or senior citizens in the area?

42 Responses



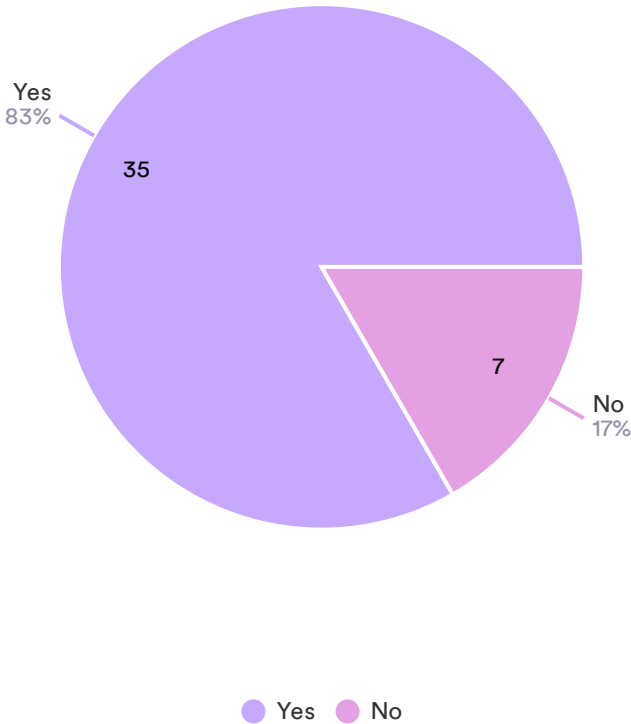
Comments:

13 Responses- 29 Empty

Data	Responses
Need more affordable family rentals	1
Yes low income homes for families	1
This should be available to everyone.	1
We have trouble attracting employees for the school district because there is no housing available.	1
Especially single level, ground floor housing for seniors with mobility issues.	1
Adequate, affordable housing is needed	1
Only if done built by a private entity	1
Maybe the county could use old hospital for assisted living or low income housing	1
Other entries	5

Does the County or your community need additional housing?

42 Responses



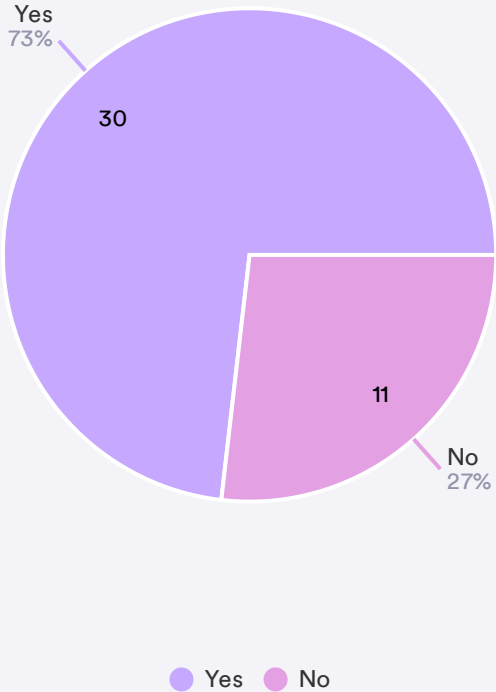
Comments:

4 Responses- 38 Empty

Data	Responses
Only if built by private entities	1
Consider options that are not manufactured housing.	1
especially low income	1
There are those looking to rent near Alzada but there isn't anything too rent.	1

Is there a need for assisted living facilities for elderly or disabled individuals in the County or your community?

41 Responses- 1 Empty

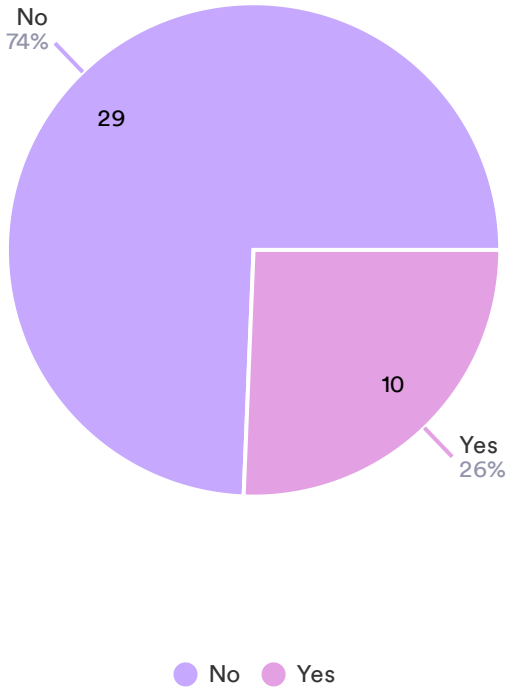


Comments:

5 Responses- 37 Empty

Are there adequate long-term rental units available in your community?

39 Responses- 3 Empty



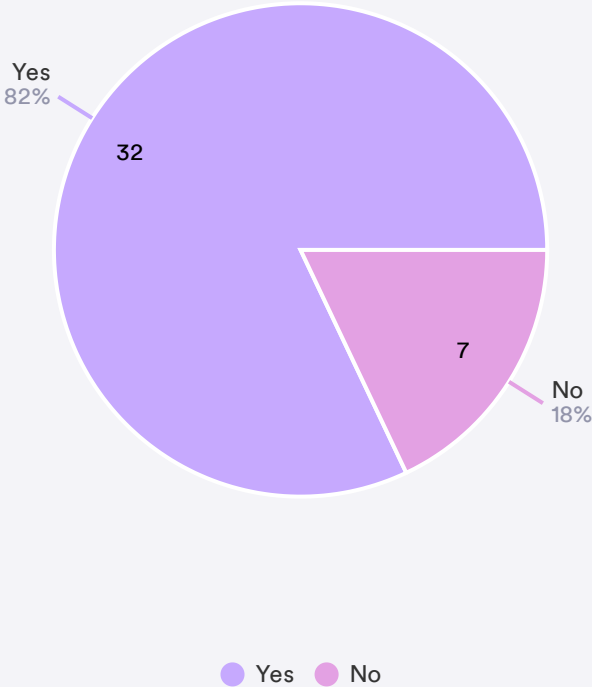
Comments:

8 Responses- 34 Empty

Data	Responses
I don't know	1
Key word you forgot is "affordable."	1
I do no know	1
not for low income	1
The rental units are too high priced for most residents	1
But not enough	1
There are none	1
actually not sure? but my guess is no . . .	1

Would you like to see economic growth occur in the County or in your community?

39 Responses- 3 Empty



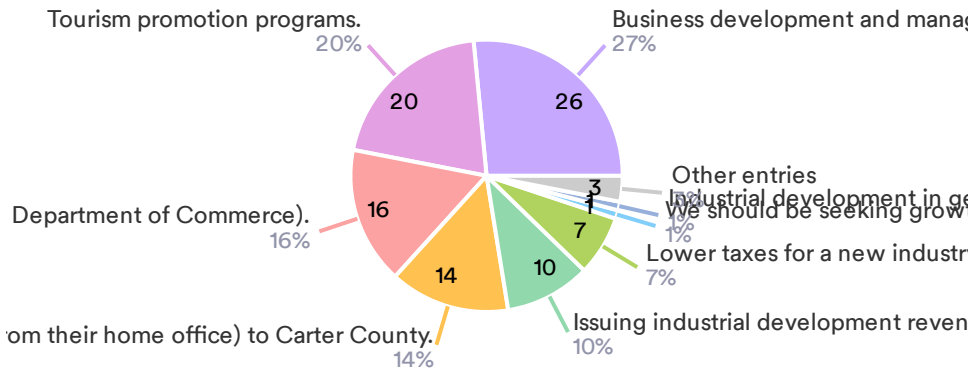
Comments:

8 Responses- 34 Empty

Data	Responses
Not the kind of growth that this survey is indicating. We don't want wind or solar power or giant oil corporations raping our land and reaping all of the profits. We want agriculture and sustainability growth so that our community can continue to feed our nation.	1
We need more businesses for main Street.	1
depends on the type of growth	1
Lack basic infrastructure to support economic growth	1
Economic growth is hard in rural area	1
Need higher paying jobs & increased salaries for teachers	1
some growth is critical for getting community to size where it exceeds minimal size for existence	1
It'd be nice to see Ekalaka spend any of the money the county brings in on the southern half of Carter county.	1

What economic development activities should be considered to promote new and existing industry/business? Check all activities you feel would be appropriate.

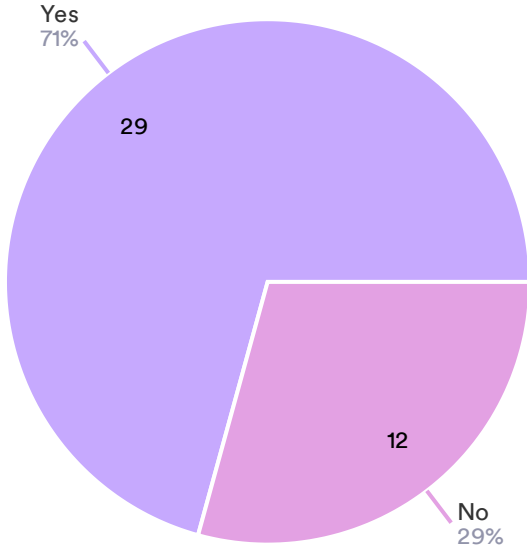
98 Responses- 9 Empty



- Business development and management assistance (ii.E., through agencies including the Department of Commerce).
- Tourism promotion programs.
- Offset training costs for new employees (i.e. through means other than County funds).
- Developing a community marketing strategy aimed at attracting telecommuters (individuals who work from their home office) to Carter County.
- Issuing industrial development revenue bonds to help industries acquire land and construct facilities.
- Lower taxes for a new industry.
- We should be seeking growth for our agricultural industries instead of promoting growth in other sectors.
- Industrial development in general is not an attractive option and don't want to become an industrial county.
- Other entries

Are more employment opportunities needed in the County?

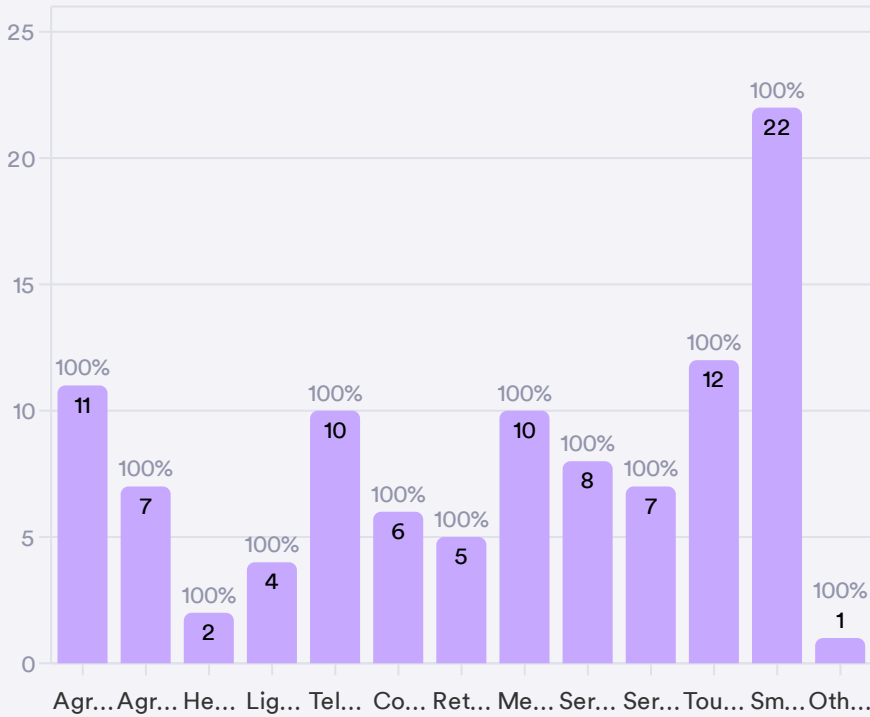
41 Responses- 1 Empty



- Yes
- No

If yes, please specify the top 3 types of employment opportunities you consider most desirable.

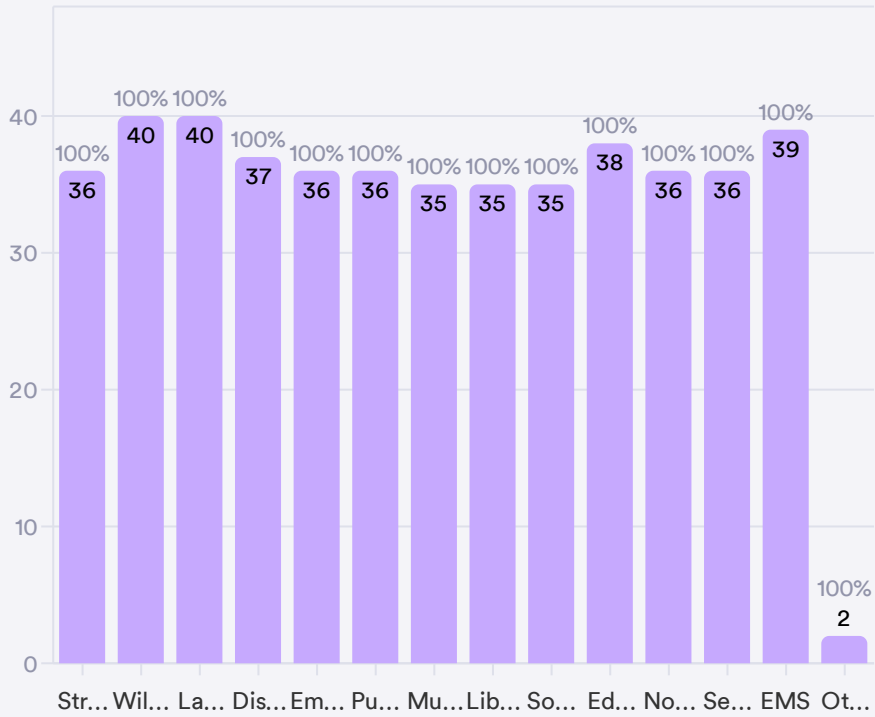
29 Responses- 13 Empty



● Place a 1 on what single item you feel is the highest priority, a 2 for the next highest,...

Please rank the services the County provides that you feel are most important.

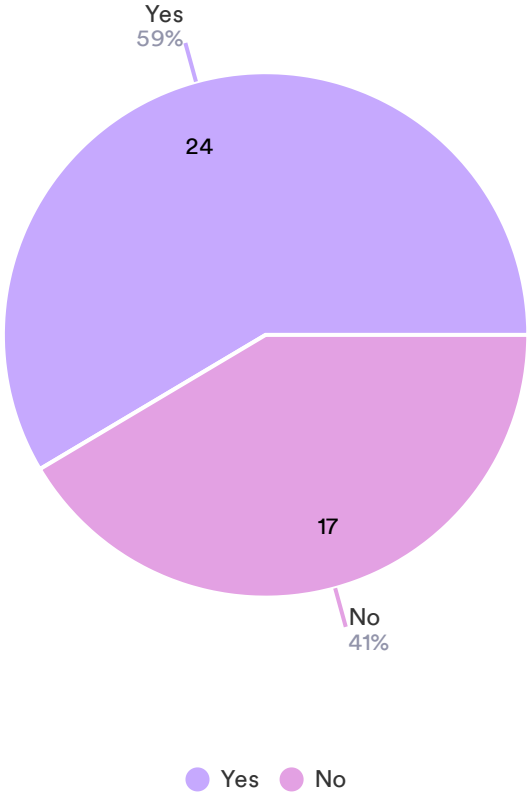
41 Responses- 1 Empty



● 1 most important; 13 least important

Do you feel the County is adequately providing local services?

41 Responses- 1 Empty

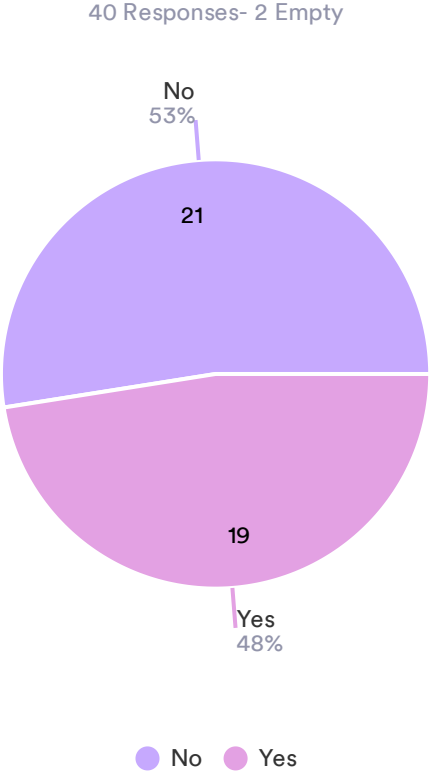


Comments:

7 Responses- 35 Empty

Data	Responses
No community in the USA is currently equipped to provide these services 100% to their communities. Bringing in large industry and corporations to our rural community will not fix any of these issues.	1
At the current time. However, younger people are needed to keep these services available.	1
The rural area is far to large for the county services to addequatly provide proper services	1
Balance ---Living in the county of size and population there is an expectation that it does not provide every similar service as larger area. Should everything befall to the county vs. other ways to achieve or meet needs	1
Law enforcement	1
Again, the county provides virtually nothing to the lower half of the county.	1
there isn't a Search and Rescue program, it is part of the sheriff/fire dept	1

Are there services that the County does not provide that you feel are important to residents of the County and should be provided? (i.e., rural high-speed internet, county-owned water and sewer, etc.)



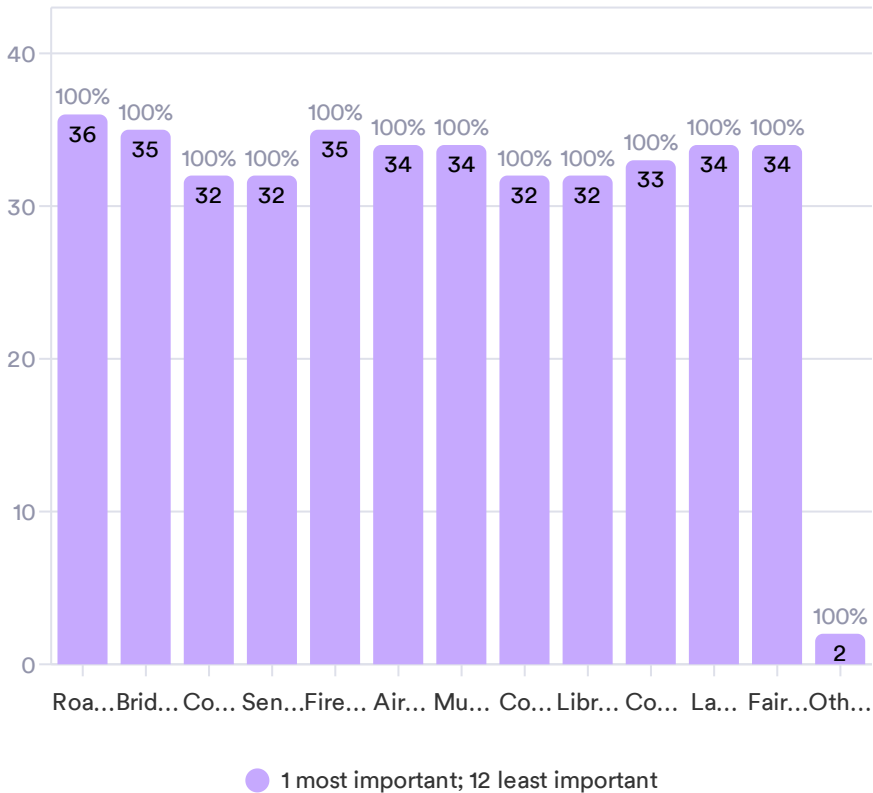
Comments:

11 Responses- 31 Empty

Data	Responses
From following the current Snowy River Carbon Dioxide Sequestration Project, our county can't be trusted to be in charge of our very limited and precious water resources.	1
Safe drinking water	1
high speed internet	1
The county currently doesn't provide any of these services they're provided by outside services or the town	1
Internet	1
The county needs to start and facilitate an update to the community's (and surrounding areas) utilities	1
high-speed internet	1
rural high speed internet; water and sewer	1

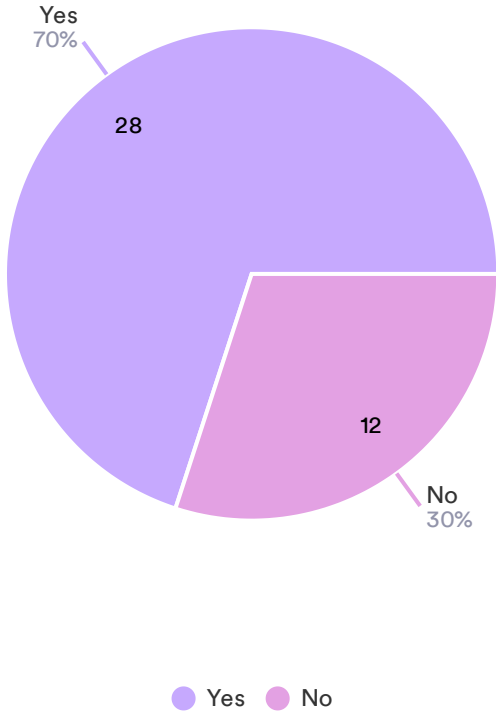
Please rank the County managed facilities that you feel are most important.

36 Responses- 6 Empty



Do you feel the County adequately provides and maintains public facilities?

40 Responses- 2 Empty



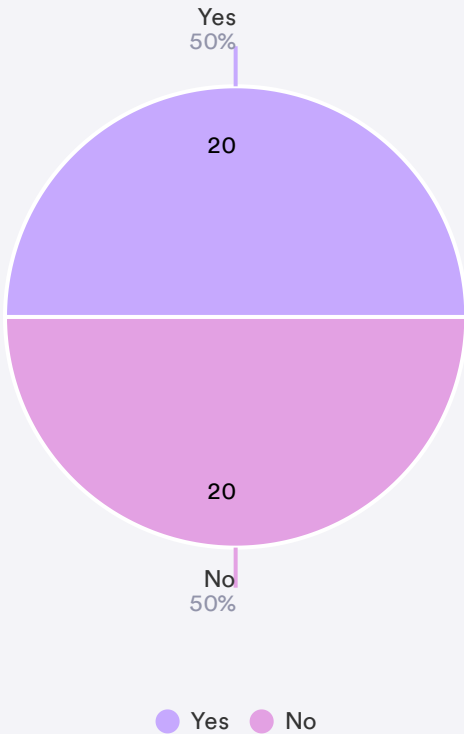
Comments:

8 Responses- 34 Empty

Data	Responses
There is always improvements or something more that can be done with each of these.	1
Parks and public restrooms with routine cleaning	1
Renovate and expand the museum and its facilities and staff	1
The museum building needs to be expanded to house exhibits that are now in storage	1
fantastic membership on the volunteer county commission appointed boards	1
roads could be better	1
Maintains yes, provides... Yes and no. Some things like the courthouse only make sense in the country seat so the answer is yes, but for things like community center, road maintenance, etc. no, the county is again laughably absent on the southern half.	1
need new Fire/EMS building	1

Are there facilities that the County does not own or manage that you feel would benefit the residents of the County? (i.e., clinic, park, recreation facilities, refuse site, cemetery, etc.)

40 Responses- 2 Empty



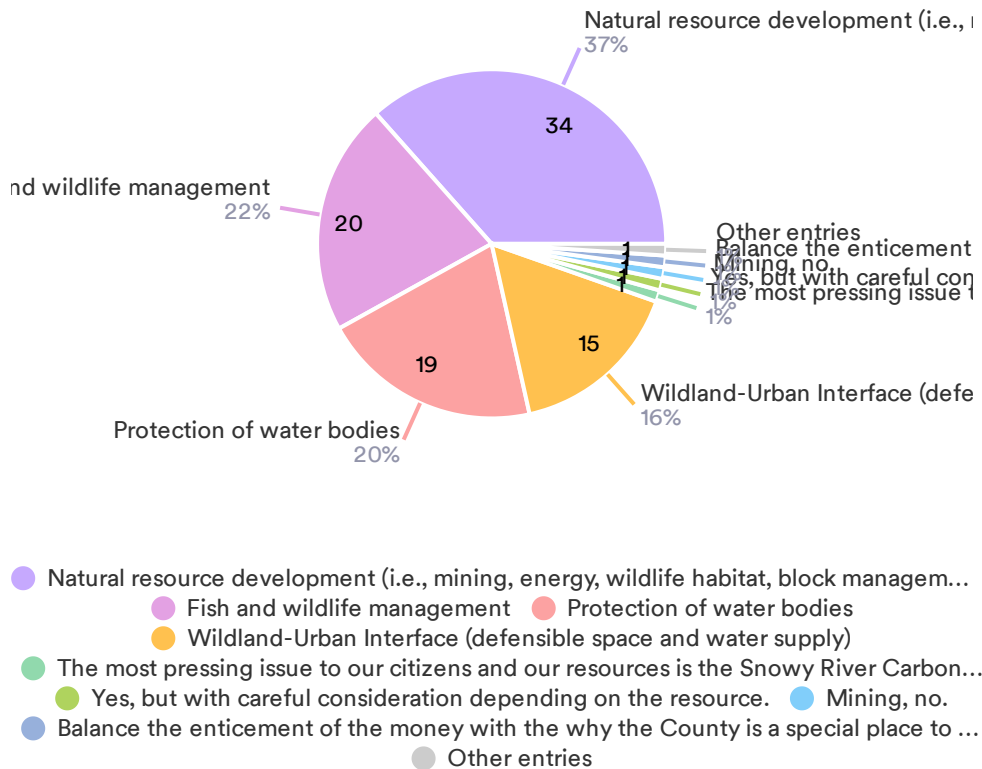
Comments:

13 Responses- 29 Empty

Data	Responses
Daycare, help with the pool, cemetery, upkeep of the town in general	1
Recycling center	1
Medical facilities DO NOT need to be "run" by County Commissioners and County Attorney	1
Public restrooms, recycling	1
Explore any potential for recycle options that provides cost offset and helps preserve landscape	1
park, public restrooms, refuse site for hunters	1
cemetery, swimming pool, low income housing, public restrooms, more motel rooms	1
swimming pool	1
Other entries	5

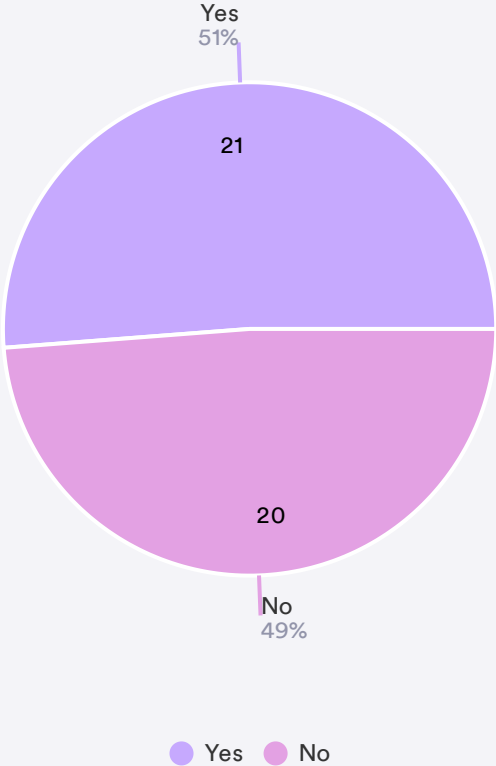
What do you consider to be the most important issues related to the County's natural resources (check all that apply)?

93 Responses- 3 Empty



Should the County promote the development of natural resources to boost the local economy?

41 Responses- 1 Empty



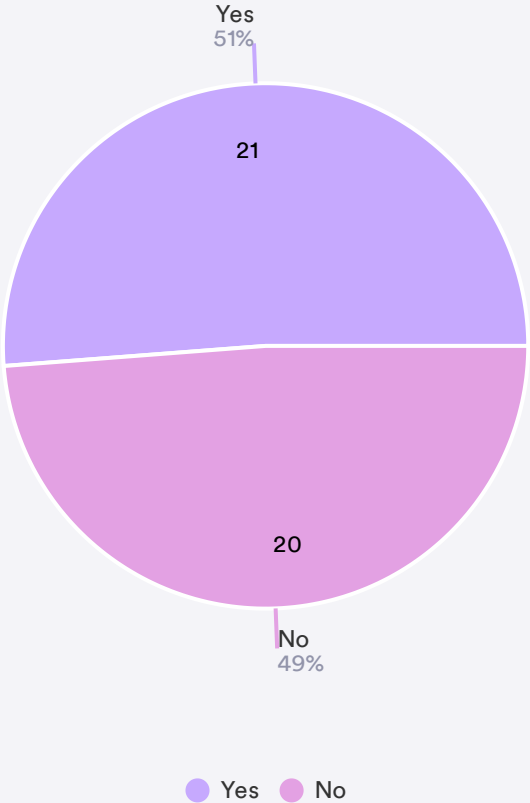
Comments:

6 Responses- 36 Empty

Data	Responses
We are not stupid. We will not allow our government and large corporations to decimate our precious lands and use them as a dumping ground. We will fight all of the industry implied in this survey.	1
Yes, with careful consideration of the resource.	1
It depends on what it is. We do not want anything that will have long-term repercussions.	1
Cautious approach	1
some oppurtunities in timber resources	1
The county should be at the table to discuss all natural resource development.	1

Are the recreational opportunities in Carter County adequate?

41 Responses- 1 Empty



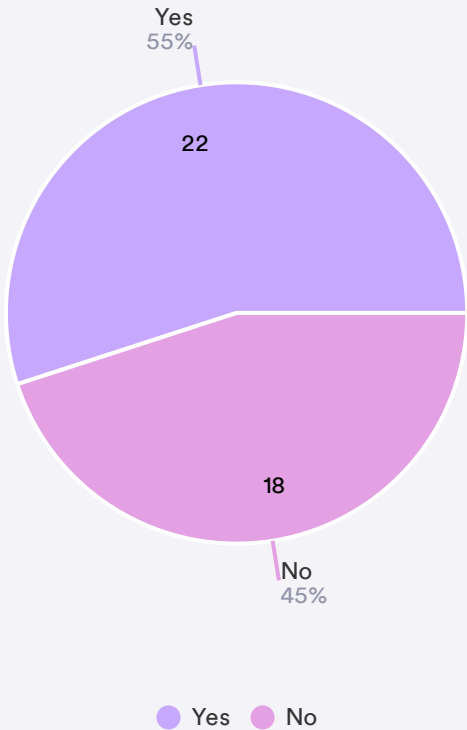
What additional facilities should be pursued by the County to promote recreational access? (i.e., improved roads, etc. to established hunting/fishing accesses, camping, etc.)

24 Responses- 18 Empty

An empty rectangular text box intended for respondents to provide their answers to the question about additional facilities to be pursued by the County.

Is recreation in Carter County that is promoted by other government agencies (i.e., Forest Service, BLM, FWP, etc.) causing impacts that should be addressed by the County?

40 Responses- 2 Empty



Comments:

12 Responses- 30 Empty

Data	Responses
The Snowy River Co2 Sequestration project.	1
The Snowy River Co2 Sequestration Project	1
The BLM should look at our the Snowy River Carbon Dioxide Sequestration project will impact the lands and wildlife that they exist to protect.	1
I do not believe there is much in promotion from these agencies. A closer presence and involvement in the community would greatly benefit recreational oppurtunities.	1
Non residents use our infrastructure extensively and we collect very little from them, if anything. I am in favor of a non resident sales tax.	1
Most outdoor recreation is from out of state hunters yet the forest and blm will not take care of forest roads county needs to step in and do so	1
Impact tbd from the FWP change to hunting districts and regulations --both directly related to County and areas adjacent	1

Additional issues you believe the County should consider in the Growth Policy:

16 Responses- 26 Empty

Data	Responses
<p>What is the timeline for this growth plan? How many other projects like the Snowy River Carbon Dioxide Sequestration project are in the works to rape the rural ag lands of our already limited resources? When will the feedback from this survey be available to the general public? What studies have been done to show that Carter County has an adequate water supply to support all of this growth? How does all of this "growth" affect our ag industries? How will all of this growth affect safety on HWY 212? The list is endless. None of the things in this survey have the true best interests of our community at heart. Residents of Carter County have been stewards of our great prairie lands for generations. We will not be bought. We will continue to move forward and evolve in a way that protects our land and allows us to continue to feed the citizens of our great nation. I have been watching what has been happening to our neighbors in Wyoming and will do everything I can to prevent that from happening to my family and our community.</p>	1
<p>We provide great opportunities for our elderly and have some amazing programs for them. Now what about the youth: daycare first to support our economy and fill jobs and then</p>	1

Thank You!

Carter County Growth Policy Survey

Summary of Community Survey Results

A total of 42 surveys were completed.

The top three reasons for living in Carter County included lifestyle/quality of life (25%), low population/sense of community (21%), and low crime/community safety and agricultural business opportunities (tied for third with 15%). Regarding activities that affected land use and respondents' livelihood, agricultural (100%), open space (95%), and recreational (77%) had the most positive impacts, while heavy industrial (79%), urban development (68%), and natural resource development (58%) had the most negative impacts.

64% of respondents were opposed to countywide zoning regulations and 78% were in favor of regulating large scale industries, such as wind farms, solar farms, hog farms, or feed lots. The majority of respondents agreed that both residential (75%) and commercial (69%) development should be promoted within currently populated areas.

The majority of respondents (71%) would like to see Carter County experience population growth and see a need for additional services related to youth or adults of child-bearing age (71%) and aging individuals (73%). Most respondents see a need for affordable and/or starter housing for low-income families or senior citizens (81%) and housing options in general (83%). Respondents see a need for assisted living (73%) and long-term rentals (74%) in the County.

Most of the respondents (82%) confirmed they would like to see economic growth occur in the County. The most supported economic development activities included business development and management assistance (27%), tourism promotion programs (20%), and offset training costs for new employees (16%). The majority of respondents (71%) believe more employment opportunities are needed in Carter County.

Just over half of the respondents (52.5%) believe the County is adequately providing local services, while 47.5% of respondents feel there are services that are important to residents that the County is not currently providing but should be. Suggested services included high speed internet and water/sewer utilities.

Most of the respondents (70%) believe the County is adequately providing and maintaining public facilities, while 30% of respondents feel there are facilities that the County does not own or manage that would benefit residents of the County. Suggested facilities included public restrooms and a swimming pool.

When asked about the most important issues related to the County's natural resources, the top three responses included natural resource development (37%), fish and wildlife management (22%), and protection of water bodies (20%). Half of respondents (51%) believe the County should promote the development of natural resources to boost the local economy.

Additionally, half of respondents (51%) feel Carter County offers adequate recreational opportunities. Respondents suggested pursuing improved infrastructure, roads, and campsites, additional recreational activities (bowling alley, swimming pool, movie theater, and walking/biking trails), and reclamation of abandoned buildings/land/property to promote recreational access. 55% of respondents believe that recreational activities promoted by other government agencies (U.S.

Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks) cause impacts that should be addressed by the County.

Suggestions for additional issues that the County should consider in the Growth Policy included the expansion of the museum, as well as public restrooms and additional activities for youth. It was also noted that Carter County's growth over the past 20 years was primarily due to companies that constructed pipelines across the county, thereby increasing tax revenues that have been used to build and maintain infrastructure (roads, bridges, buildings, and equipment).



**Appendix C:
Public Open House**

**Carter County, Montana
Growth Policy
2024**

Carter County Growth Policy Open House

Date: Monday, June 3rd, 2024

Time: 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Location: Commissioners' Chambers, 214 Park Street in Ekalaka, MT

Purpose: To share the Land Planning Board's efforts and to create an opportunity for the public to have a voice and provide meaningful input into the Growth Policy process



What is a Growth Policy?

A Growth Policy is a community's growth and development plan. It evaluates existing conditions and sets goals for population, land use, housing, economic development, local services, public facilities, natural resources, and other unique characteristics and features of the community. The process is guided by Montana Code Annotated 2023 Title 76, Chapter 1, Part 6 and facilitated by the County's land planning board. A Growth Policy is not a regulation or ordinance, but it serves as the legal basis for enacting them.

Why develop a Growth Policy in a County with little growth?

Change will happen. Whether this means growth or decline in population and resources, both require a plan to address a variety of issues throughout the County.

What are the advantages to having a Growth Policy?

- **Maintains community values** - preserves cultural and historical values, helps maintain the character of the community
- **Creates safer communities** - sets standards and promotes projects that improve infrastructure and services, such as roads, bridges, water resources, sewer systems, solid waste, fire and emergency services, health facilities
- **Encourages affordable housing** - addresses challenges to safe and affordable housing for area residents
- **Saves money** - identifies growth patterns that minimize the cost to provide local services and infrastructure
- **Builds community** - facilitates greater understanding of local issues
- **Attracts business** - fosters a more attractive and well-planned community
- **Provides funding opportunities** - elevates community management in the eyes of regional, state, and federal funding agencies

How do I provide input?

To share the Land Planning Board's efforts and to assist them in making better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of the community, your input is encouraged! You may provide comments in the following ways:

- In person to the committee during the open house
- By filling out a Public Comment Form during the open house
- By filling out the comment box on the project website at www.carter.stahlyprojects.com
- By contacting Melissa Schwede, Carter County Commission Clerk, at (406) 775-8749 or mschwede@cartercounty.us or Robie Culver, Growth Policy Consultant, at (406) 442-8594 or rculver@seaeng.com

We value your participation in this process and want to hear your opinions, suggestions, concerns, and questions. Please reach out!

What happens next?

Following this open house, the Growth Policy committee will review and address any significant comments received during the public involvement process. This includes making any needed changes to the document. The Land Planning Board will then meet to recommend adoption of the final document to the County Commissioners. The Commissioners will have the opportunity to review the final document and then meet to consider adopting the Growth Policy.

Did you know?

As part of the Growth Policy process, a community survey was conducted. Did you know that the top 3 reasons for living in Carter County include:

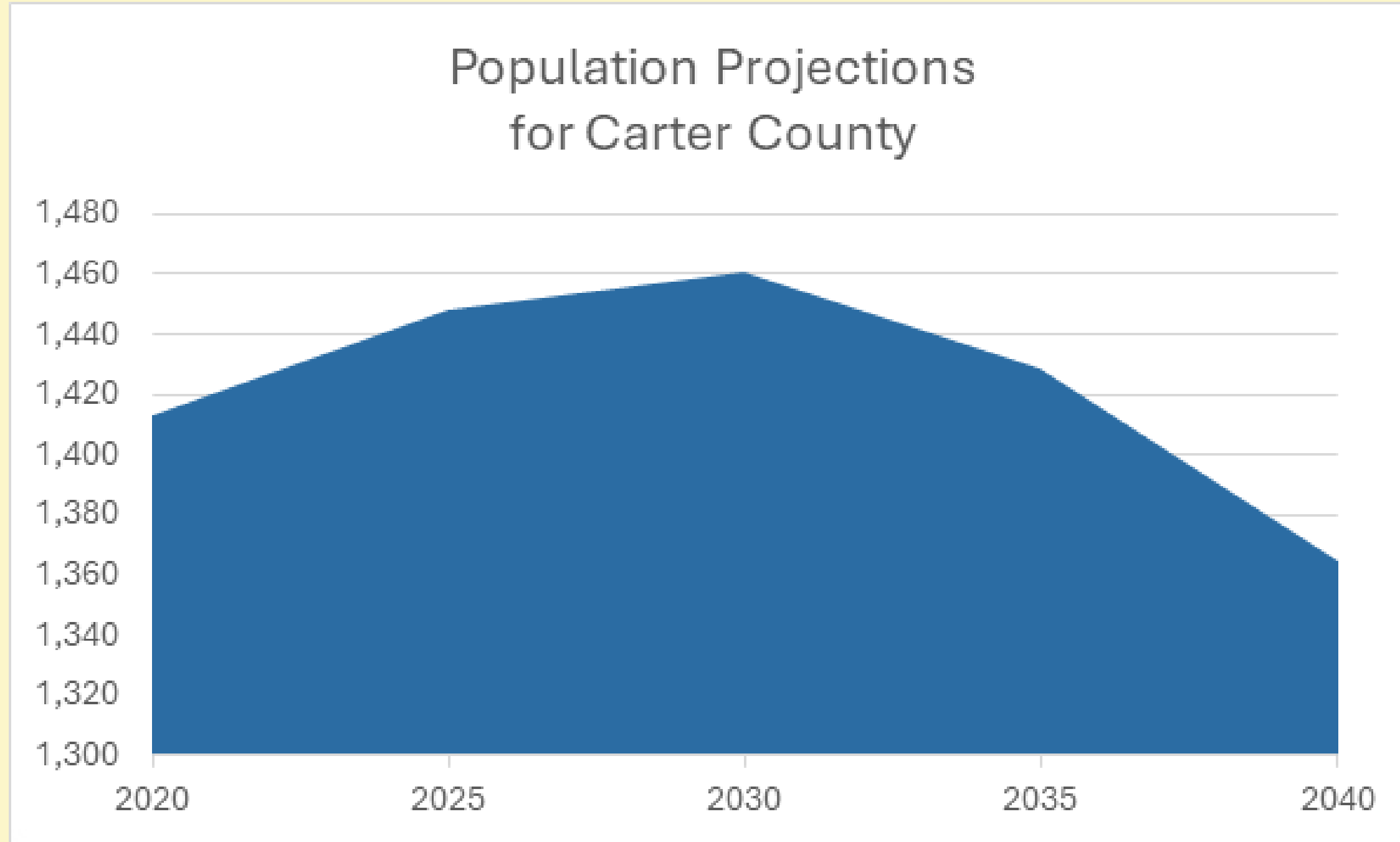
1. Lifestyle/Quality of Life
2. Low Population/Sense of Community
3. Low Crime/Community Safety and Agricultural Business Opportunities



***Thank you for
participating in
today's Open House!***

Carter County Growth Policy Open House

Section 3: Population

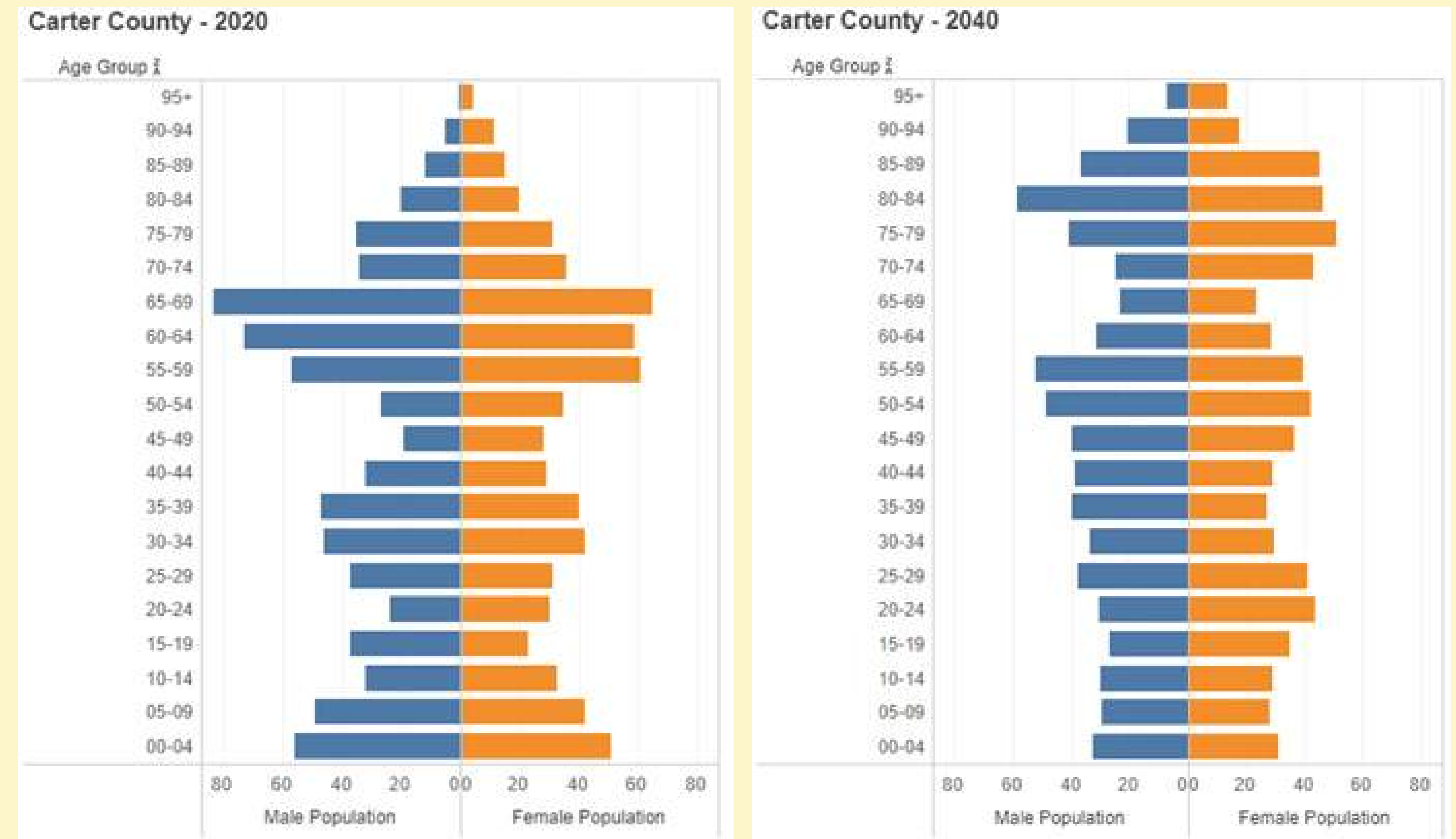


Source: Montana Department of Commerce, 2023

Factors leading to a population decline in the county may be related to a general decline in the birth rate as parents are choosing to have smaller families. Residents may also be choosing to relocate to larger communities with more cultural, economic, or educational opportunities.

The 20-year trend from 2020 to 2040 shows the largest growth in the age groups 50-54 and 80-84 years with a decrease in those 30-34 and 65-69 years. Implications for such trends include a need for affordable housing, healthcare, and recreational opportunities.

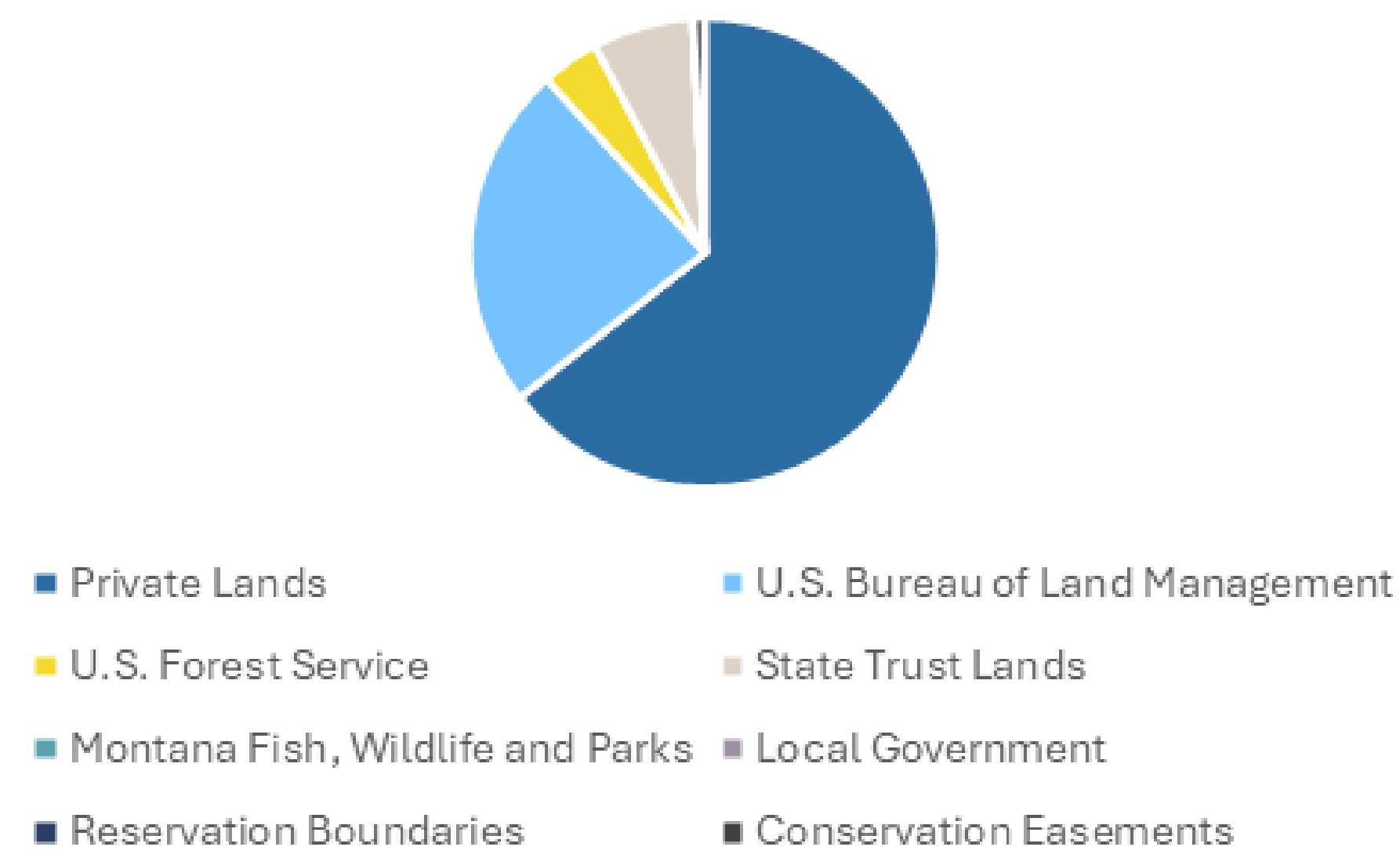
Carter County Age Pyramids - 2020 and 2040



Source: Montana Department of Commerce, 2023

Section 4: Land Use

Carter County Land Ownership



Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024

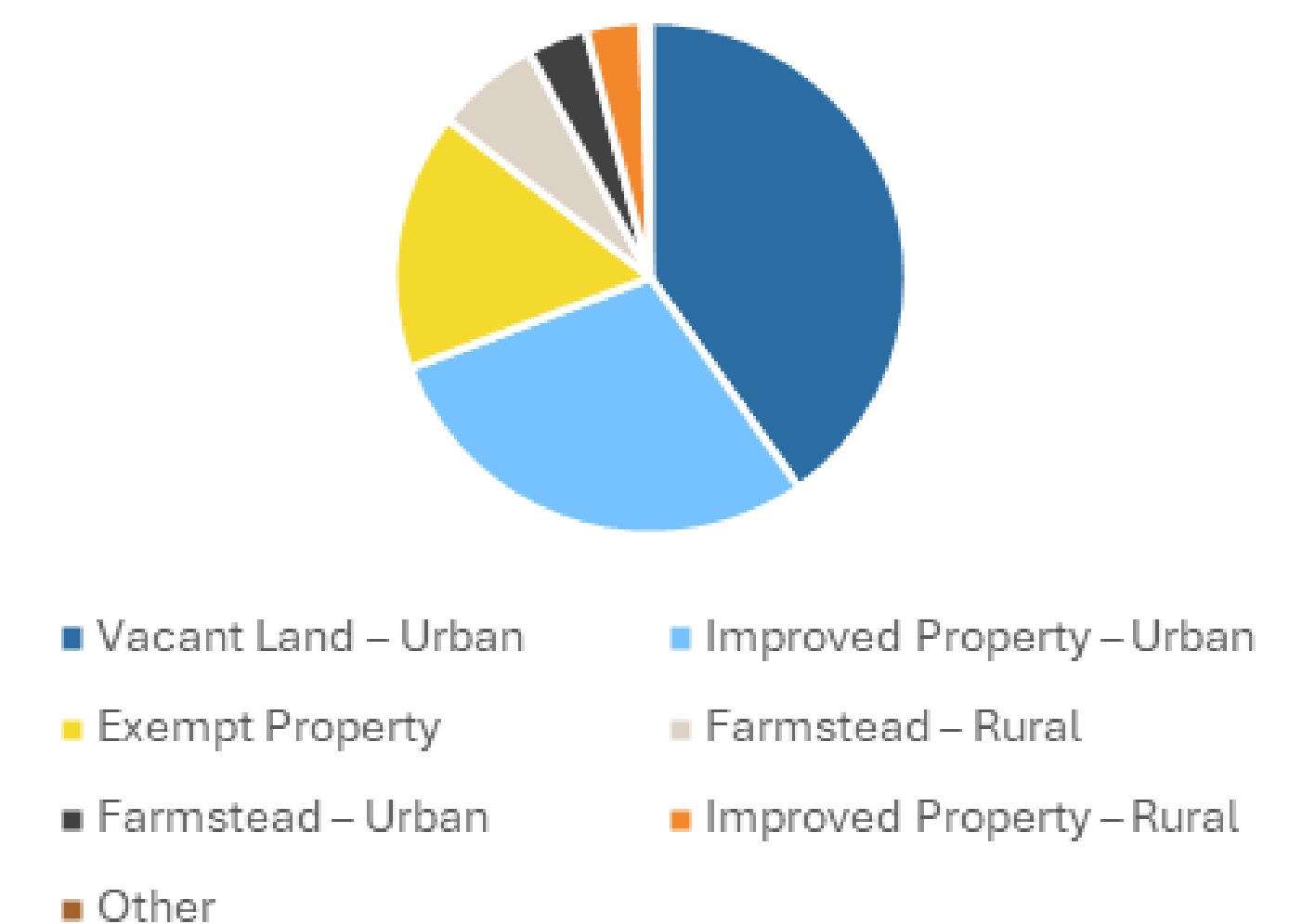
Carter County Agricultural Profile

	2002	2007	2012	2017
Number of Farms	289	308	327	323
Average Size (acres)	5,768	5,514	5,437	5,473
Total Land in Farms (acres)	1,666,922	1,698,383	1,778,011	1,767,723

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017

It is anticipated that 65% of the land in Carter County will continue to be privately owned, while the remaining 35% continues to be owned and managed by various governmental agencies. As a result, continued cooperation and communication between Carter County officials and both private and governmental landowners will be critical to guiding development in a manner that is consistent with the values of Carter County residents.

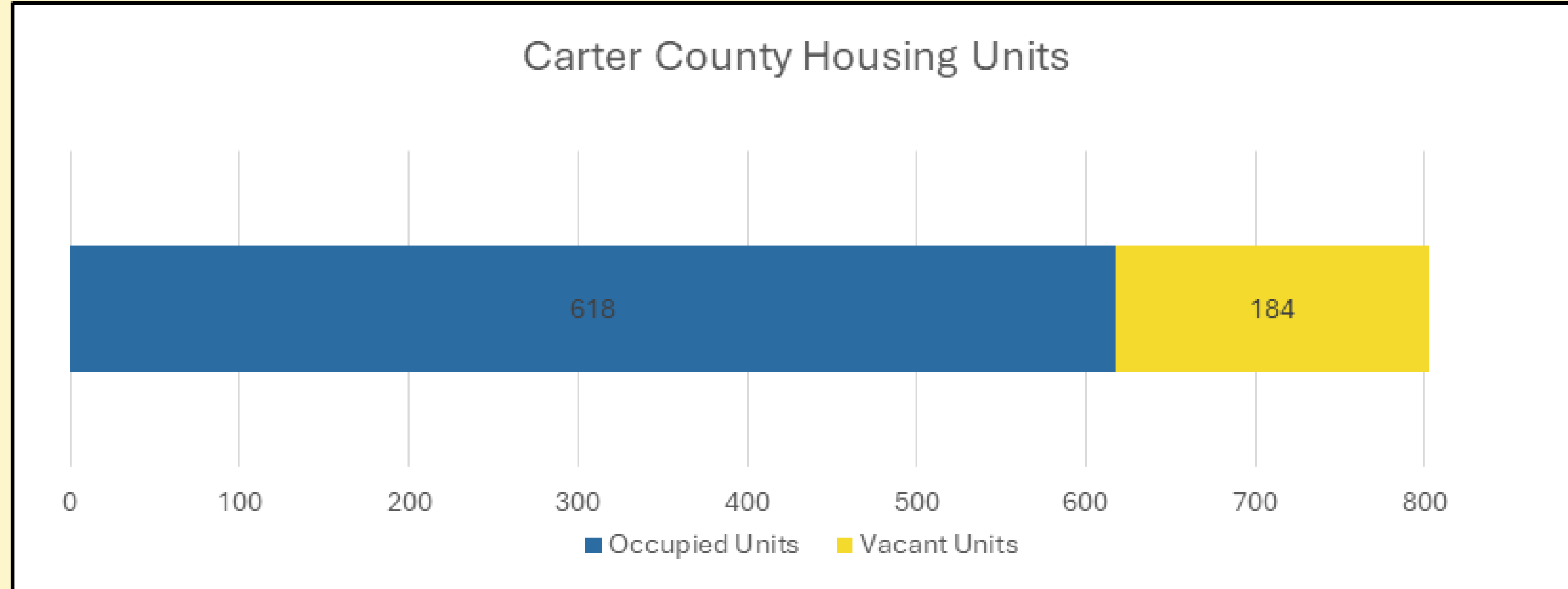
Property Type in Ekalaka



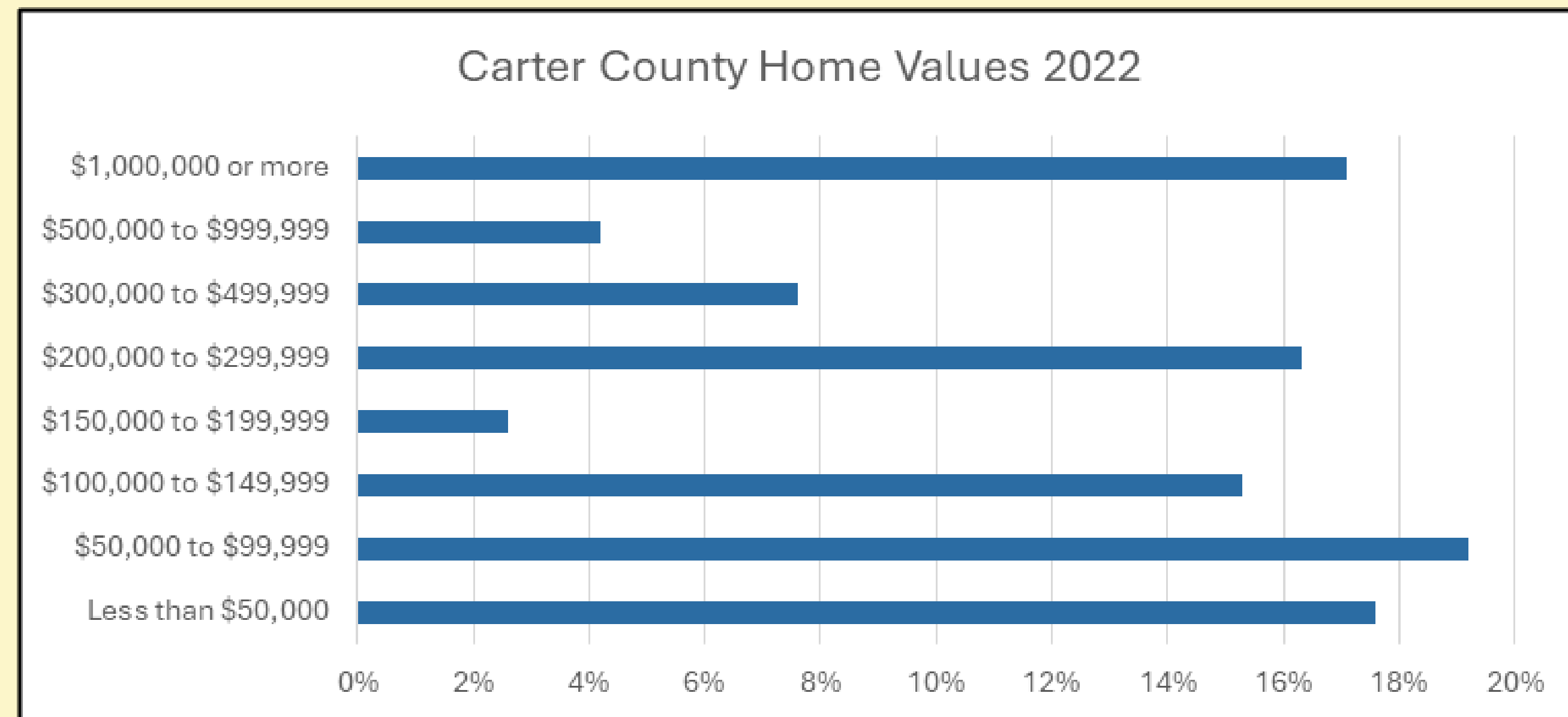
Source: Montana Cadastral Owner Parcels Data, 2023

Carter County Growth Policy Open House

Section 5: Housing



Source: Headwaters Economics, 2023



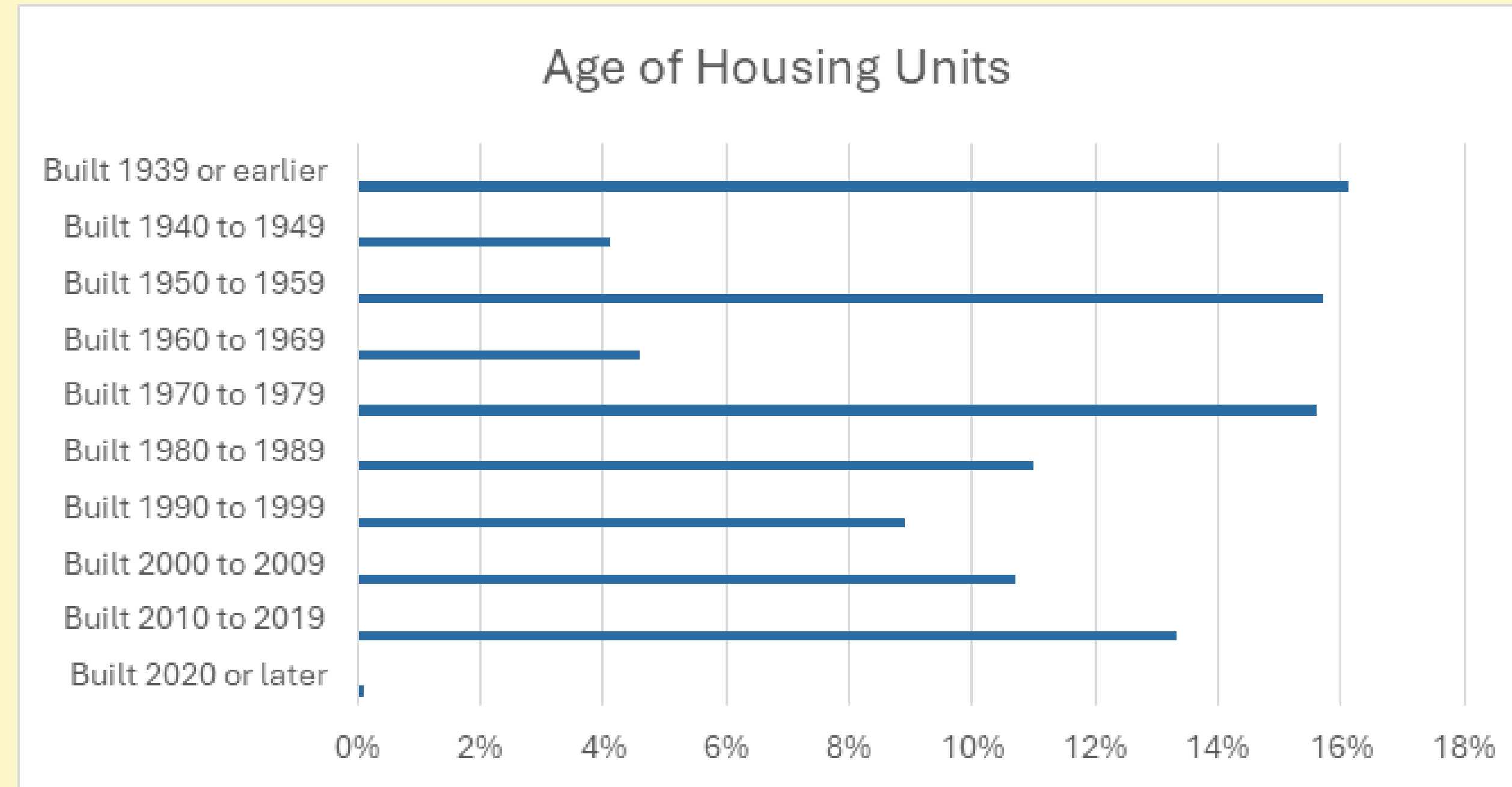
Source: 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024

Carter County Housing Affordability

Percent of Households with Housing Costs Greater than 30% of Total Household Income			
	Carter County	Montana	United States
Mortgage Costs	37.8%	28.9%	27.9%
Rent	58.1%	44.6%	51.9%

Source: 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024

Housing is considered to be affordable if homeowner costs, which include mortgage payments, real estate taxes, utilities, insurance, and various other fees, are less than 30% of the total household income. Both Carter County percentages are higher than the statewide and national averages.



Source: 2022 ACS 5-Year Estimates Data Profiles, 2024

Given Carter County's population projections, housing that supports the needs of seniors will continue to be in demand. Services that support the health and well-being of this age group will also be needed. This includes medical and emergency services, fire protection, and law enforcement.

Did you know?

As part of the Growth Policy process, a community survey was conducted. Did you know that the majority of respondents (71%) would like to see Carter County experience population growth and see a need for additional services related to youth or adults of child-bearing age (71%) and aging individuals (73%).

Most respondents also see a need for affordable and/or starter housing for low-income families or senior citizens (81%) and housing options in general (83%). Respondents see a need for assisted living (73%) and long-term rentals (74%) in Carter County.

Additionally, 64% of respondents were opposed to countywide zoning regulations and 78% were in favor of regulating large scale industries, such as wind farms, solar farms, hog farms, or feed lots. The majority of respondents agreed that both residential (75%) and commercial (69%) development should be promoted within currently populated areas.



Carter County Growth Policy Open House

Section 6: Economic Development

Industries in Carter County and Ekalaka

Industry	Carter County	Montana
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	48.4%	8.1%
Construction	10.8%	17.2%
Manufacturing	0.6%	2.0%
Wholesale trade	0.0%	0.0%
Retail trade	4.8%	10.1%
Transport, warehousing, and utilities	3.7%	4.0%
Information	0.4%	0.0%
Finance, insurance, and real estate	2.7%	5.6%
Professional, management, administration, and waste management	3.0%	5.1%
Education, health care, and social assistance	9.7%	17.2%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation, and food	3.9%	10.6%
Other services, except public administration	5.8%	9.6%
Public administration	6.2%	10.6%

Source: Headwaters Economics, 2023

Expansion of the following industries are likely to result in increased economic growth for Carter County:

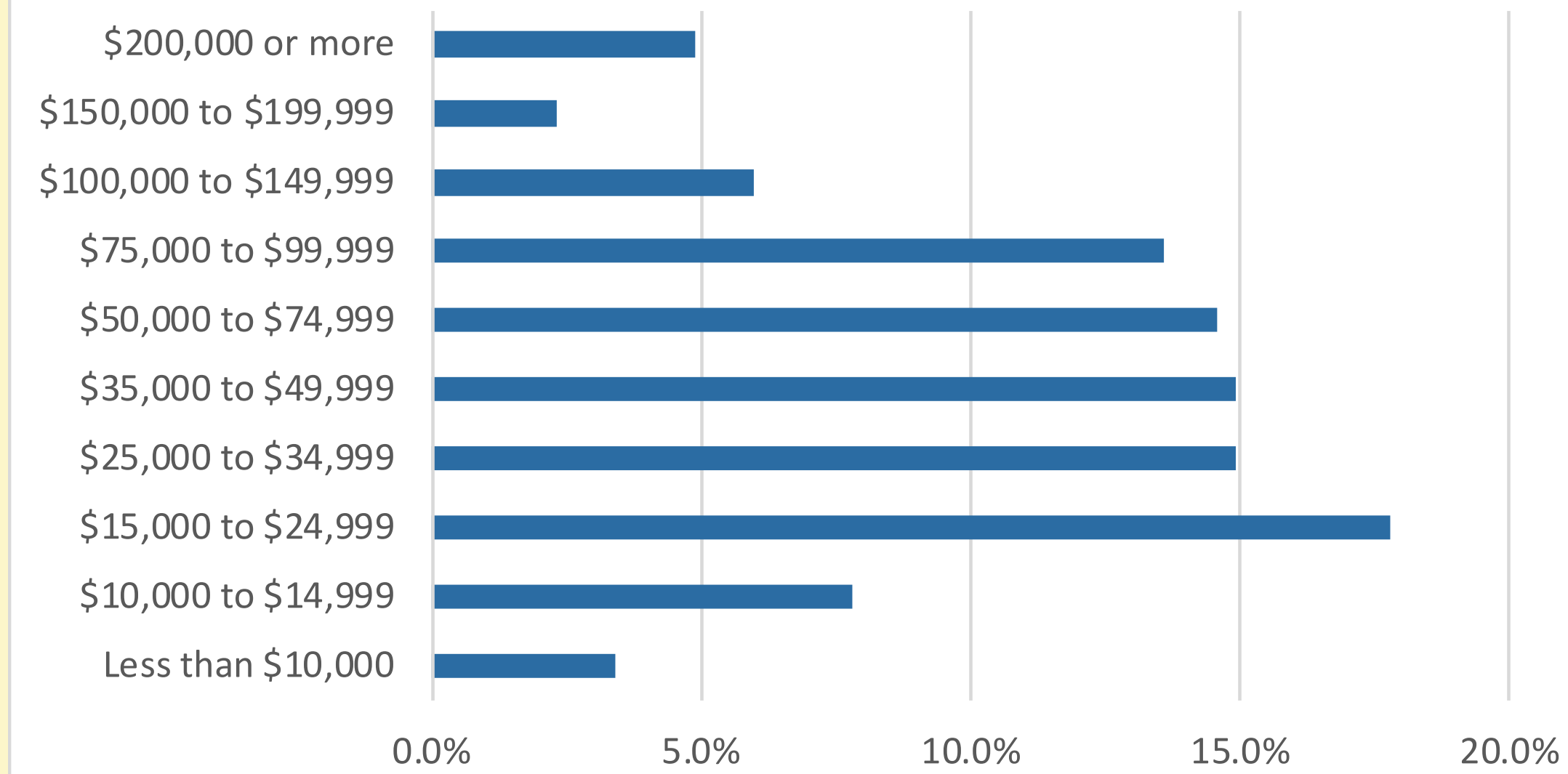
- Agriculture/forestry/fishing/hunting/mining
- Construction

Additionally, the following industries present new opportunities for economic development strategies:

- Manufacturing
- Wholesale trade
- Retail trade
- Information
- Finance/insurance/real estate
- Professional/scientific/management
- Education/health care/social assistance
- Arts/entertainment/recreation/accommodation/food industries

For more details, refer to section 6.3 of the Growth Policy.

2021 Household Incomes in Carter County



Source: Headwaters Economics, 2023

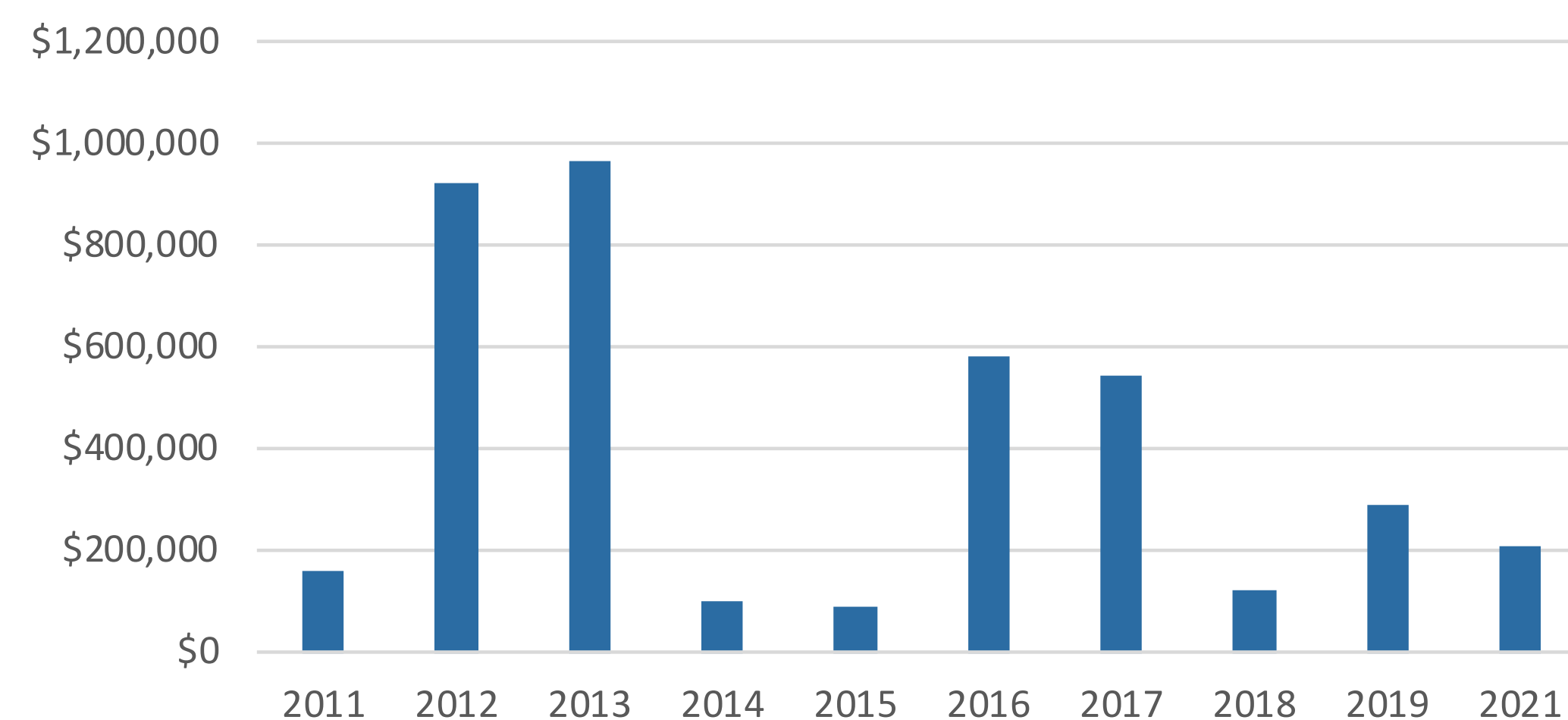
Constraints on economic growth for the southeast region of Montana, including Carter County, include:

- Insufficient/aging infrastructure
- Low population
- Attitudes
- Non-diversified economy

Assets of Carter County and the southeast region include:

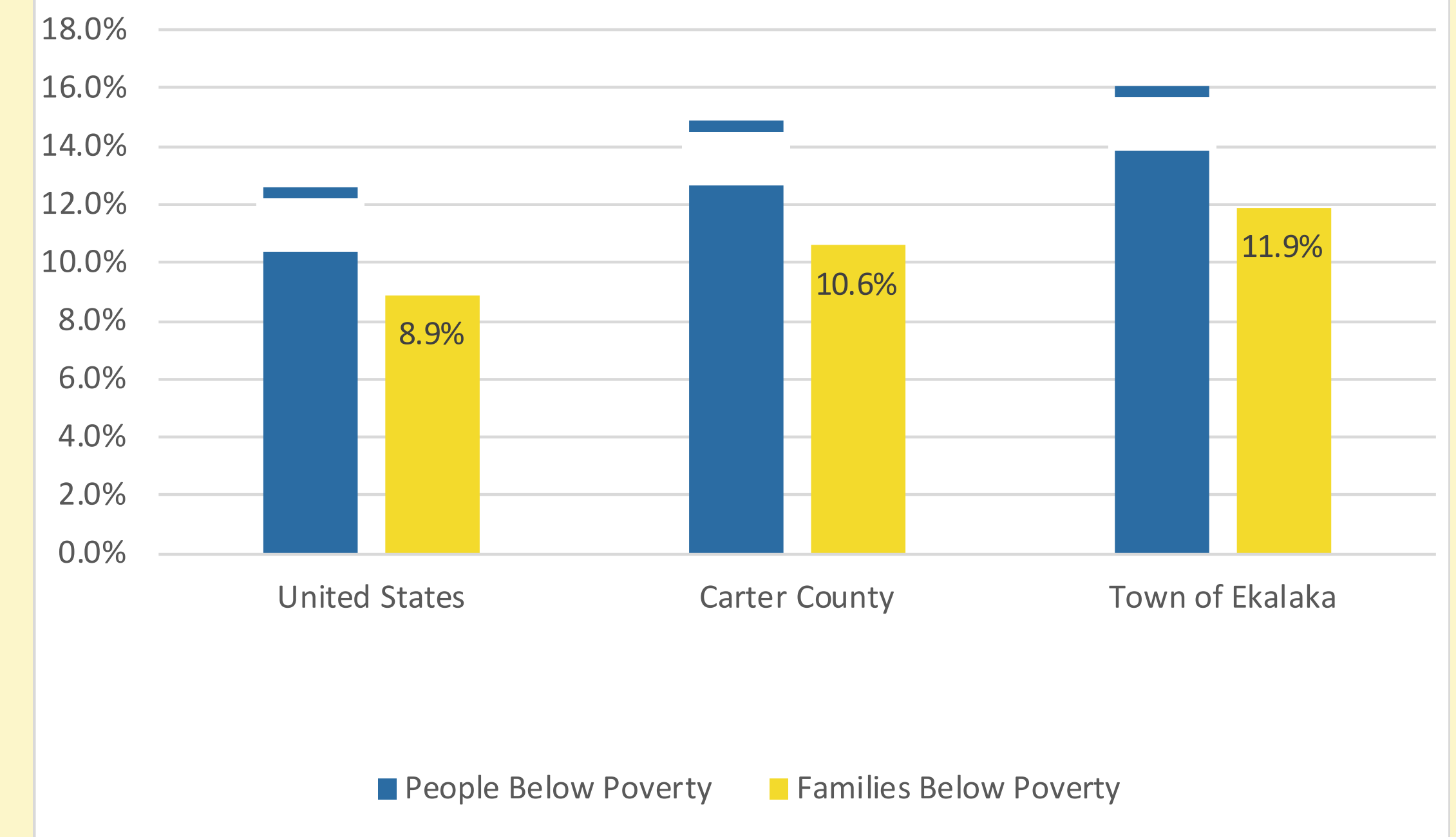
- Location
- Communities
- Tourism
- Agriculture
- Natural resources
- Environment

Carter County Nonresident Visitor Expenditures



Source: Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, 2024

% Below Poverty



Source: Headwaters Economics, 2023

Tourism helps fuel Carter County's economy. Visitors from both in state and out of state travel to Carter County to visit Medicine Rocks State Park to enjoy activities, such as photography, hiking, and wildlife viewing. The Carter County Museum is 1 of 14 museums on the Montana Dinosaur Trail. Many visitors travel to Ekalaka to see the world-renowned dinosaur, American Indian, local history, and natural history displays. Hunting, fishing, and trapping also remain popular tourist activities in Carter County.

Carter County Growth Policy Open House

Section 7: Local Services and Public Facilities

Carter County provides the following services:

- Fire protection
- Law enforcement
- Disaster and emergency services
- Public health
- Social services
- Health care
- Education
- Noxious weed management
- Land conservation
- Communications
- Electricity and natural gas
- Transportation
- Water supply
- Wastewater collection and treatment
- Solid waste

Public facilities in Carter County include:

- Courthouse
- Emergency medical services
- Fairgrounds
- Museum
- Airport
- Camp Needmore
- Public Library
- Senior citizens center
- Cemetery

Multiple County departments/facilities are presently in need of capital improvements, including the Rural Fire Department, Weed Department, EMS, Fairgrounds, and Camp Needmore. Additionally, expansion plans for the Carter County Museum are gaining momentum.

The County completed construction of a new hospital in 2021 and is evaluating how to repurpose the old facilities to better serve the community. In October 2023, Adaapta prepared a community engagement summary detailing the activities and results of their efforts to solicit input from Carter County residents regarding the reuse or redevelopment of the old hospital facilities.

Carter County residents identified the community's top weaknesses by category as being housing, transportation infrastructure, and growth and economic opportunity. Top reuse ideas identified by residents included a recreational center, assisted living, office space, senior center, housing, daycare, and public health. When asked to vote for or against these ideas, residents favored a daycare, housing, senior center, and recreational center

Did you know?

As part of the Growth Policy process, a community survey was conducted. Did you know that just over half of the respondents (52.5%) believe the County is adequately providing local services, while 47.5% of respondents feel there are services that are important to residents that the County is not currently providing but should be. Suggested services included high speed internet and water/sewer utilities.

Did you know that most of the respondents (70%) believe the County is adequately providing and maintaining public facilities, while 30% of respondents feel there are facilities that the County does not own or manage that would benefit residents of the County. Suggested facilities included public restrooms and a swimming pool.

Section 8: Natural Resources and Recreational Access

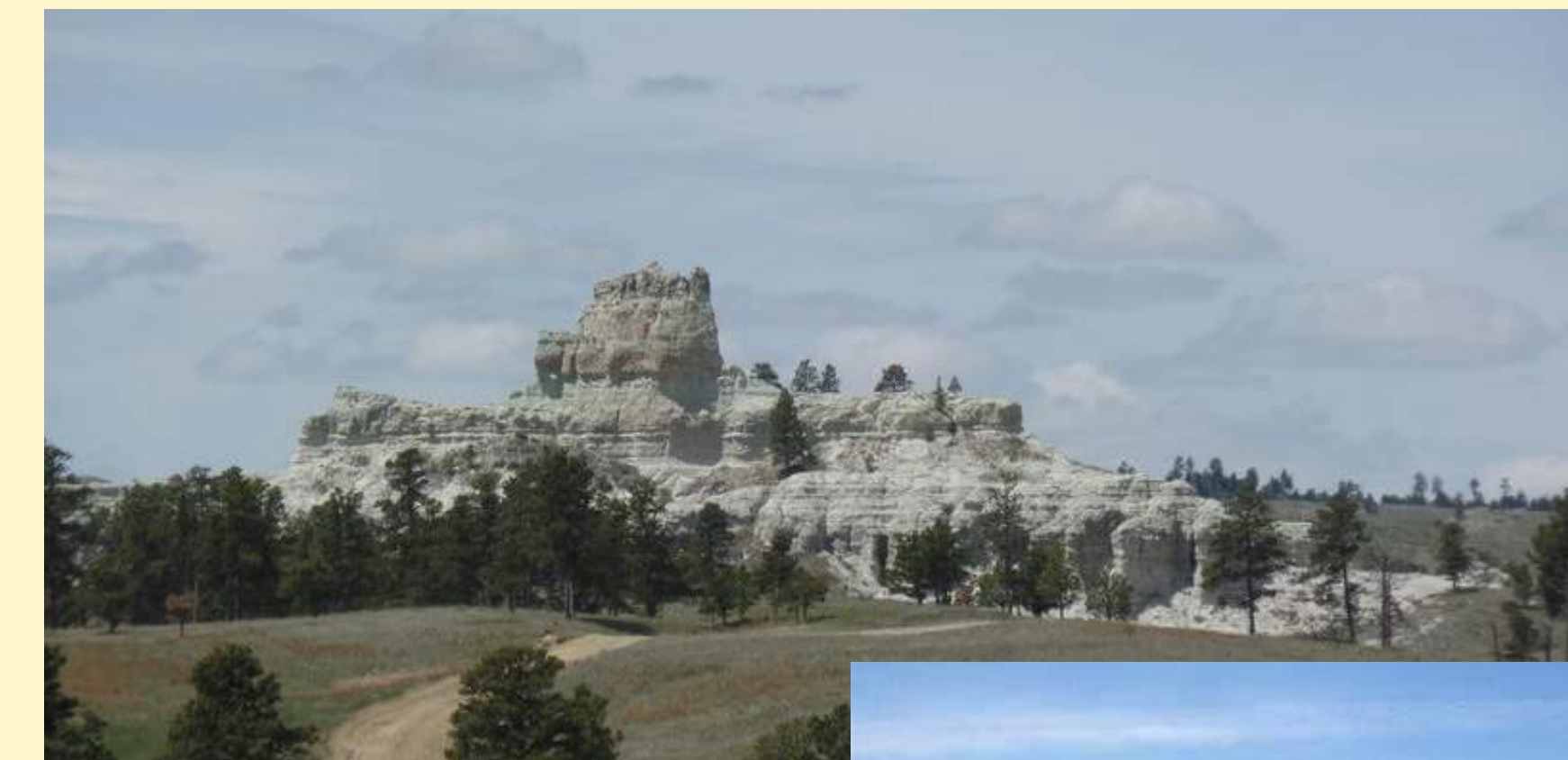
Carter County Land Cover Summary

	Acres	Percent
Grassland Systems	893,069	42%
Shrubland and Steppe Systems	705,134	33%
Human Land Use	210,231	10%
<i>Agriculture (cultivated crops and pasture/hay)</i>	196,989	9%
<i>Developed</i>	13,236	1%
<i>Mining and Resource Extraction</i>	6	<1%
Wetland and Riparian Systems	123,741	6%
Forest and Woodland Systems	84,471	4%
Sparse and Barren Systems	64,454	3%
Recently Disturbed or Modified	60,304	3%

Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program, 2024

Local recreational facilities in Carter County include:

- McNab Pond and Campground (approximately 9 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a campground and stocked fishing pond that contains crappie, bass, and rainbow trout)
- Capitol Rock Natural Landmark (approximately 47 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a massive sandstone remnant that resembles the Capitol Building in Washington, DC)
- Tri-Point Fire Lookout Tower (approximately 30 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a 60-foot steel tower built in 1936)
- Medicine Rocks State Park (approximately 11 miles north of Ekalaka; a series of natural rock formations considered sacred by local Native American tribes)
- Ekalaka Park and Campground (approximately 10 miles south of Ekalaka; located in the Ekalaka Hills, which consist of scenic drop-offs and cliff-edge views over the prairie)
- Camp Needmore (approximately 7 miles southeast of Ekalaka; a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp that now hosts 4-H and football camps, family reunions, hunters, and other visitors)



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CARTER COUNTY MONTANA

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