

Southwest Montana

General Board Meeting – Dillon

June 27, 2013 Minutes

Board Members: Dale Carlson, Desiree Shogren, George Everett, Amber Wood-Jensen, Maria Pochervina, Fay Najjar, Judy Westfall, Jamie Cottom, Julie Shelton, Anna Provost, Ellen Baumler, Mike Mergenthaler, Paul Marsh, Dave Williams

Participants: Rebecca Schmitz, Brandi Jensen, Kelly Sullivan, Pat Doyle, Cheryl Ackerman, Laura Brayko, Shawn Peterson, Mike Steele, Dave Cole, Tom Harrington, Leonard Wortman, Leona Rodreick, Cass Cairns, Suzanne Elfstrom

Speakers and presenters: Leona Rodreick and Cass Cairns – National Forest Service, Rebecca Schmitz – MARS Stout, Suzanne Elfstrom – Partners Creative, Shawn Peterson – Tempest Technologies, Tom Harrington, Leonard Wortman, and Dave Cole – Friends of Pipestone

President Julie Shelton called the meeting to order and we each did a self-introduction.

Leona Rodreick, Public Affairs Officer, from the Beaverhead – Deer Lodge National Forest talked about recreation in the area forests. We have over 3.3 million acres of forests in over seven counties. They will be celebrating their 50th year wilderness anniversary. Leona talked about several of the different areas, trails, upgrades, and trail packets they have. She also said they have updated forest maps. They are also working on a bear resistant program and she passed around one of the containers that people can borrow when going into the forest.

Cass Cairn, National Incident Management Team Public Information Officer, talked about the visitors to the Rainbow area. They hold a meeting annually between July 1st – July 7th. The main gathering is on July 4th to pray for peace. Their operating plan includes public safety, post event clean up and rehabilitation. She gave us a slide show explaining how they work at keeping the forests as uninterrupted as possible.

Mike Mergenthaler moved to approve the minutes and Kelly Smith seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

Since there was no public comment we moved on the financial report. Sarah had handouts for the accounts and reported that we have \$28,784.82 in membership funds, \$2,998.99 in the state checkbook and \$11,275.55 in the money market. Amber Wood-Jensen moved to approve the financial report. Fay seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For executive report: Sarah reported that our marketing plan sailed through at the Tourism Advisory Council meeting. Suzanne Elfstrom deserved recognition for this as only two plans went through without any further requested information. A schedule to work at the Montana Folk Festival at the Montana Office of Tourism booth was passed around for members to sign in three hour slots. We had a Visitor Information Center meeting in Great Falls. The travel counselors talked about how they need information to give the travelers and would like more information on accommodations. We had a website meeting in Helena and Shawn will fill in the information from there later in the meeting. We have a familiarization tour coming up in August that will include Virginia City's 150th year celebration.

Julie Shelton reported on the membership discussion before the meeting. We are looking at different advertising options and a tiered membership. We are looking at a redesign of the travel guide and a committee was formed that included Ellen Baumler, Maria Pochevina, Kelly Smith, Pat Hansen, and Jamie Cottom.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout gave the inquiry report. She compared inquiries and guides mailed over the last five years. Our inquiries were down over last year but up over the year before. *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Reader's Digest* are the mail sources for our reader service leads. History is the main interest with wildlife watching and rock hounding following in second and third. The top four states for inquiries were California, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Texas. On a lighter note, Rebecca said she had a call from someone wanting to know if she had an inside source on where the meeting for the Rainbow people would be.

We talked about the Tourism Advisory Council meeting held in Kalispell at the beginning of the month. Amber had set up a new way to go through all the marketing plans and budgets from the grueling way it was done in the past. It was a great success and made the meeting much more informative and enjoyable. Suzanne also remarked on how well the cultural art presentations were.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative gave us a marketing report and presentation. She talked about marketing in *Oh Ranger* which goes in both the national parks in Montana and the *USA Today National Park* special which was distributed to households. Suzanne also talked about how traditional advertising with reader service is changing. This is now becoming antiquated. On the other hand, our online click-through rates on our advertising is surpassing the industry standard. Our press room is doing very well. We have had several recent articles including *Senior Citizen Travel*, *Eye Explore Magazine*, and *Country Magazine* pick up articles and information from the press room. The *Country Magazine* was a major 10 page spread with full page color pictures about the Pioneer Mountains. Paul Marsh also said that *Zone 4* had a six page spread on the Jackson Gardens. Their gardens are becoming very popular in the area.

Suzanne also presented six different brand options for Southwest Montana. After much discussion, she is going to have a couple tweaked and we will circulate for more feedback next month.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave us an update and a report on our website committee meeting. Their videographer has been shooting lots of video including Lewis and Clark Caverns, Deer Lodge Auto Museum and in each of the hot springs around the region. Since there is another week of nice green scenery he will be shooting waterways, rivers and lakes. They are looking at setting up the events page to be able to pull up information by activities. This will also hopefully work for Suzanne for Trip Advisor for attaching our events so she can add more variety. They have bike trail information and have Ty and Perry getting more footage in Lewis and Clark County. If anyone has any more ideas for people for avid Mountain biking let us know. They are using cameras to help get some footage.

Ennis is the only place that has turned in daytrips so far. People are asked to turn in the information so we can get this up on the site.

Google has made lots of changes now and it is making it more of a challenge to use duplicate information from MTOT. Google's latest search engines are duplicate controlled. We need more unique travel related content. They are building a historical section and Ellen Baumler has been very helpful with resources and content. They would like any information from the membership on history as well. They are looking at expanding out the community pages and adding features.

We had Tom Harrington, Leonard Wortman, and Dave Cole from the Friends of Pipestone come and talk about the recreational trails in the expanded area. They are looking to get maps and a kiosk set up for recreationalists that include biking, ATV's, snowmobiling, hiking and motor biking. They are looking at developing the area into a year-round recreation attraction. It would be kind of like the Utah Paiute trails that have over 1100 miles of trail and started about 1997. They are looking at including Whitehall, Boulder, Marysville, Clancey and more. They are looking at doing 10 new kiosks to help promote and preserve the area for about \$30,000. They also would like to print up some maps of the trails.

Under old business, George Everett from the Montana Folk Festival said the festival will be in Butte in two weeks. They have 20 performers for six stages. They will have buses from Missoula and are working on some others. They are advertising in Calgary, Spokane, Oregon and more. They have been making great use of Facebook as well. They are building a relationship with the National Parks. George is looking for an airplane and pilot to take a photographer up to take photos of the event. The schedule will be in newspapers, brochures and available on smart phones. They still need volunteers. Please go to MontanaFolkfestival.com to sign-up. There are about 50 different tasks to choose from.

Several other events were discussed.

Meeting adjourned at 1:11 p.m.