

Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Best Western Premier Great Northern Hotel
April 23, 2014 minutes

Participants: Board members: Julie Shelton, Dale Siegford, Paul Marsh, Mike Mergenthaler, Jason Wood, Dave Williams, Kerri Kumasaka, Judy Westfall, Becky Henne, Lynette Kemp, Carol Eichler, Anna Provost, Ellen Baumler, Fay Najjar, Pamela Kimmey, employee Sarah Bannon, Members and others: Bruce Anfinson, Heidi O'Brien, Pat Doyle, Brandi Jensen, Courtney Jones, Sandra Pettey, Linda Brown, Shawn Peterson – Tempest Technologies – Website Management, Carellen Nix, Stephanie Munk, Gary Provost, Leona Rodreick, Barb Sanem, Debbie Carlstrom, Suzanne Elfstrom, Partners Creative – advertising agency

President Julie Shelton called the meeting to order. She thanked Carol Eichler and the Best Western Premier for hosting the meeting. She also thanked Dale Siegford for bringing the boxes of chocolate to pass around during the meeting. We went around the room and each of us gave a self-introduction.

Anna Provost moved to approve the minutes. Fay Najjar seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Since there was no public comment we went into the financial report. Sarah had handouts of all the expenses. We have \$15,349.89 in the membership account. We have \$3,769.09 in the state account and \$76,911.04 in the money market as of 3/31/14. Becky Henne moved that the financial report be approved as submitted. Mike Mergenthaler seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

For Executive Director Report, Sarah said she had been working on the budget and marketing plan for next year. Went to CTAP (Community Tourism Assessment Program) coupled with Main Street in Ennis. Met with Leona Rodreick and Shawn Peterson at Tempest Technologies to discuss Forest Service information and opportunities. Road Construction in Deer Lodge is affecting traffic into the city as the south entrance is closed. We have a Montana Office of Tourism workshop in Deer Lodge called "Coming Together to Tell the Montana Story." We have the Rocky Mountain International Round Up coming up in Missoula where we will be talking with international tour operators. A familiarization tour will follow the Roundup. The Montana Office of Tourism will have Visitor Information Center training in Butte. We will be taking Big Sky visitor information people on a FAM tour that Friday afternoon through Saturday evening. A state park's focus group is at Lewis and Clark Caverns on April 30th. Southwest Montana won six of the eight awards given out at the Governor's Conference on Tourism. We won the Cooperative Marketing, Madison County won the event with their Marathon, the TIIP grant project went to the World Museum of Mining, the Electronic Grant went to Deer Lodge Development Group and Julie Shelton won the Tourism Ambassador of the year!

Julie Shelton talked about meeting for the membership and will mention it later in the meeting. We also discussed the budget and marketing plan. We talked about it in the executive board meeting and will discuss in more detail later in the meeting.

Rebecca Schmitz from MARS Stout sent an inquiry report from the call center. She had detailed the first three months for the last six years. The 2014 numbers are not as high due to us not doing as much reader service. Most magazines have dropped the reader service now and have found it not as useful as it once was. Our inquiries through March 553 and 605 guides have been mailed. AAA Living has given us the most sources for travel guides followed by our website. Most interests are history and ghost towns followed by wildlife watching, Lewis & Clark and rock hounding. The most inquiries came from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Michigan.

Julie Shelton reported that Mike Strang, Sarah and she met to discuss membership and toss some ideas together. The membership committee will meet and then we will discuss more at the next meeting. If you want to be on the membership committee please let us know.

Shawn Peterson from Tempest Technologies talked about the website and internet. We have information going out on Facebook, twitter, Pinterest, and the blog. Everyone is encouraged to check out the blog as it has some interesting stories on it. Our Analytics are still down with the name change. We need more links to our website to help. Everyone is asked to put their links to the website. Instructions on how to do that are at

<http://southwestmt.com/linktourwebsite/>. If you need help please let us know. Many of you have links to our old site but it would be helpful to update to the new one. They are working still on biking and working with Pat Doyle of the Helena Tourism Business Improvement District. If anyone is riding trails we would like to get more information.

An international inquiry came through Partners Creative wanting to put the Ski Joring Video on their public television. It was a company out of Japan. Shawn said they will put a link to SWMT whenever they show it. It will be from 3-4 in the morning under extreme sports. They are doing member updates with badges. We met with Leona Rodreick and the Forest Service to discuss website and share information.

We talked about links again and ask people to use the text link if possible.

We talked about the tear-off maps. Ellen Baumler asked if we could put National Historic Landmark symbol on the map and historic districts (HD.) Anna Provost liked the color coding. We will need a list for each area in order of priority. We discussed horizontal and vertical and other information. Carellen asked to have the map entirely on one page and other information on the back.

Becky Henne talked about all the Superhost activity. They have several trainings going on in the area. They need at least 15 people at each training. Heidi O'Brien talked about a frontline trip they are doing Sunday. It is a Gates of the Mountain trip and people are invited to join them.

We took a break for lunch Carol offered us all Great Northern Signature Cookies after lunch.

Sarah and Suzanne talked about the budget and marketing plan. Sarah had a detail of the fiscal year 14/15 budget and a breakdown of the administration budget. She presented a comparison of the current budget and the projected budget. The overall projected revenue is \$361,629. We also added in \$16,000 of projected uncommitted funds. New projects include a website redesign, tear-off maps, new birding brochure, and lodging listing guide with the state. Dale Siegford moved to accept the budget as presented and Lynette Kemp seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Suzanne Elfstrom from Partners Creative talked about the new marketing plan online. The Tourism Advisory Council wants more information on how the plan fits with the brand pillars and how we inspire, orientate, and facilitate tourism. We talked about a few challenges that we have such as hours open for visitor centers and attractions. We have a similar plan as last year with updates from research from a few different places including the Institute on Research and Recreation. Carol moved that we approve the plan and Dale seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Leona Rodreick gave an update on the Beaverhead / Deer Lodge National Forest. She talked about recreational opportunities at Lemhi Pass, Crystal Park, and other places. She had some publications to pass out and offered the information online and on CD. We can print PDF's off as we need them. They have rental cabins and people can make reservations at recreation.gov. The snow in the upper elevations is above normal and the might have lots of melt off which could affect the roads. Fire Team predictive services predict that fire activity is normal to lower. The Madison Ranger District has information on storing food in a safe manner. Visitors need to make sure they store food so it doesn't attract bears. They will have Wildflower Tours in June and July. Elkhorn Hot Springs is under new ownership. They are closed for 6-7 weeks for improvements. It is the 50th Anniversary for the Wilderness Act. She will be doing a news release and you can send Lenona a request to be involved at: lmrodreick@fs.fed.us

Sandy Shulls from Birds and Beaslys has brochures with coupons attached. We need pictures with events. Email to Sarah who will forward on to Debbie.

Heidi O'Brien reported that Helena is in Rand McNally Best of Road – for Geo Caching. We talked about International Mountain biking and got to Helenmt.com. Also, Sandy Shulls said there is an International Migration called Birds and Blooms in Helena.

Our next meetings were set (if dates work out) for June 19th at Helena Comfort Inn and Suites and September 18th at Lewis and Clark Caverns. (Our next meeting has a conflict and will be scheduled for Virginia City.)