

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting – Via Zoom
October 29, 2020**

Participants: Sarah Bannon (SW Montana Executive Director), Julie Shelton, Patrick Fox, Rebecca Schmitz, Melanie Sanchez, Victor Sample, Mary Johnston, Linda Brown, Andrea Opitz, Neala Siegle, Erinn Donnell, Jeanette Kopf, Jocelyn Dodge, Maria Porchevina, Mike Mergenthaler, Ryan Hannohoe, Debbie Carlstrom, Katya Peterson, Stephanie Sorini, Julie Schroeder, Mike Strang, Jim McGowan, Chantelle McDuffie, Jan Thorne, Rhea Armstrong, Ross and Kerri Kumasaka

Minutes – Mike Mergenthaler made a motion that the September meeting minutes be approved as submitted. Victor Sample seconded the motion and the motion was passed.

Public Comment – Events and activities in various communities were announced.

Financial Report – Sarah shared the financial report. In the membership account, as of 9/30/2020, there was \$474,323.87. The majority of this money is from the CARES Grant. In the state accounts, as of 9/30/2020, there was \$70,836.16 in the checking account and \$176,126.88 in the money market account. Mike Mergenthaler made a motion to approve the financial report. Julie Shelton seconded the motion and the motion was passed.

Executive Director Report

1. There were two presentations with Voices of Tourism (Dax) aimed at educating legislators about tourism in Montana.
2. Travel guide – Please get your events to Sarah.
3. With the Safety Grant there have been some website updates, new posters, billboards, reusable water bottles, etc.
4. There is current a call for photos. Please let any photographers know about this.
5. Sarah will be sending out a “Doodle” to see what time works best for the SW Montana meetings.
6. Mike M. asked if the dollars for the travel guide ads have been coming in okay. Sarah answered that there was only one community that did not renew their ad, and two new full page ads were added: Whitehall and MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

COVID-19 Information - Sarah said she is working with Butte and Helena to develop posters for the second round of messaging from the state. Water bottles are being produced, as well as videos for gas stations, website updates, etc.

Inquiry Report - Rebecca Schmitz from Corporate Cost Control had a report on the call center.

1. The pandemic has changed what they do. They answer the phone for Montana Tourism and they are getting lots of questions regarding COVID regulations. In addition, for SW Montana, a lot of callers want to know what is open and what they can do.
2. The numbers of inquiries are down. The highest number of inquiries were from the SW Montana website and they were mostly Montanans asking about outdoor activities (e.g. fishing access sites).
3. Wildlife viewing replaced history and ghost towns as the number one interest.
4. Maria asked if the call center is getting a lot of relocation questions. Rebecca said they are getting some and they usually refer people to the chambers and to MT.gov.

Marketing Update – Neala Siegle from Windfall Studio gave a marketing update.

1. Travel guides - There was some discussion about the travel guides and the events that will be listed. On the events page, it was suggested that a banner be added that says that with the pandemic going on, it would be good to check with the local chambers to see if the events are still happening. People could also be directed to the website. It would be important to keep the events updated on the website. Jocelyn said that it would be good to establish relationships with public lands management agencies to keep informed about closures. It was suggested that we invite people from these agencies to our meetings. Sarah will contact the chambers to let them know who has listings in the travel guide so that the chambers can contact others who are not listed. The deadline will be extended to early November (possibly November 10). The travel guides are scheduled to be printed the first week of March 2021. For 2021, we are looking at printing 140,000 to 150,000. Normally, 165,000 are printed. The cover photo will be selected at the November SW Montana meeting.
2. There was some negative feedback with the social media campaign in the spring so this campaign was discontinued for a while. The campaign was resumed in September.
3. CARES Grant – Posters, flyers to insert in the travel guides, water bottles, etc. are being developed for the safety campaign. There have been some social media ads placed, as well as print ads in Sojern, Glacier Country, the Missoulian and the Bozeman Chronicle. The primary target audience is the drive markets in Montana, Idaho and Washington. There are some local radio ads (with the message, “Know Before You Go.”). In addition, there have been some gas station video ads being placed and some in-stream video ads being placed.
4. There is a call for photos out. The CARES Grant money can be used for this.

Website, Internet Updates – Katya Peterson from Tempest Technologies gave a report.

1. Tempest has been making updates to the website using the MT Aware logo. They continue to update the COVID page and travel updates page. People can update or submit an event right on the website.
2. COVID information was added on the videos displays throughout SW Montana. Eleven are done so far and there is only one more to do.
3. Katya showed a clip of a 30 second video. There is also a shorter 15 second version of this video. There is another video in production entitled, “Our Backyard”. One version will be for travelers from Montana and the other targeting the drive markets.
4. The website calendar has a Zoom link to the SW Montana meetings so people can click on this link when they want to join the meeting.

Astrotourism – Ryan Hannahoe from the MT Learning gave a presentation.

Montana Learning Center is located on Canyon Ferry Lake and is situated on a ten acre campus. They have provided science camps for kids since the mid-1980's. They can sleep up to 100 people with 8 dorms, classrooms and a dining hall.

Ryan's background is in astronomy, and the Learning Center has several telescopes. Ryan shared that ninety-five percent of the world cannot see the night sky and ninety-nine percent of the US cannot see the Milky Way because of light pollution.

The Learning Center has two observatories. They will have a third site which will have the largest telescope in Montana. They currently have the largest public use telescope in Montana. Their space can be rented out for private parties. They have star parties, and are having a Big Sky Star Festival on July 9 – 11, 2021. They are a non-profit 501(c)(3) and their budget has tripled since 2018. They will be applying for a Tourism Grant.

Ryan shared some websites:

Montana Learning Center

<http://montanalearning.org/>

Astronomy Program

<http://montanalearning.org/astromony/>

Star Fest

<http://montanalearning.org/star-fest/>

All Sky Camera (24/7)

<http://mlcallsky.org/>

LIVE Weather

<https://map.bloomsky.com/weather-stations/faBiuZWsq6epqamj>

Other Business – None.

Next meeting – The next meeting will be on November 19, 2020 on Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:45 am.

Meeting minutes submitted by Kerri Kumasaka.