

**Southwest Montana
General Board Meeting via Zoom
Thursday, March 18, 2021
Minutes**

Participants: Kerri Kumasaka, Mike Mergenthaler, Neala Siegle, Dale Carlson, Mike Strang, Katya Peterson, Linda Brown, Mary Johnston, Vic Sample, Ross Johnson, Jan Thorne, Bruce Binkowski, Debbie Carlstrom, Erinn Donnell, Julie Croglio, Julie Schroder, Megan Richter Bland, Becky Di Giovanna, Rhea Armstrong, Rebecca Jones, Andrea Hannon, Elizabeth Pullman, Eva Bryan, Sonya Rosenthal, Susan Ovitt, Maria Pochervina, Jocelyn Dodge, Shawn Peterson, Julie Shelton, and Employee Sarah Bannon

Executive Board President Maria Pochervina called the meeting to order at 10:00am.

Approval of Minutes – Ross Johnson made motion to approve the minutes from January 21, 2021. Seconded by Jocelyn Dodge and passed unanimously.

Public Comment – No public comment.

Legislative Updates – Maria gave updates on two bills of concern that would affect our region and tourism.

HS2 – This is an amendment submitted by Rep. Dan Bartel out of Lewistown to remove regions/CVB funding from a statutory appropriation to be a part of the state general budget with a cap of \$8.9 million. This could potentially defund regions and CVB's. Recreation would be removed as well. After tourism people from regions, CVB's, hoteliers and others advised legislators of the amendment, it was pulled, and funding is secured.

SB355 – This bill would take 3% (approximately \$1 million annually) of the promotional funds allocated to the Department of Commerce to support Virginia/Nevada Cities in place of the current \$400,000 they receive annually. This bill would also take away \$482,000 out of tourism promotion to 16 counties with significant amount of state lands with no parameter on how the money would be spent. Our promotion dollars are for out of state tourists and currently local travelers due to COVID-19. This bill calls for Daniels County to receive 70% (\$330,000) annually. That is greater than the annual budget for most regions and CVB's.

A Tourism Matters link will be emailed out for updates.

Ad Creative, marketing, other – Neala complimented on a nice job to the CVB Directors, Regions and those that rallied to turn the legislature around.

Neala gave a presentation and updates. The last couple weeks, they have been working on the Warm Season Creative. They have moved into a new direction as we have been using the "Dig Deeper" theme since 2017. The new concept will be "The Rest is History". An example is Mountains, Rivers & Rodeos; The Rest is History. This new direction highlights the authentic experience of the region. The tone will represent authentic, friendly, genuine, history, adventurous, and exciting. Megan mentioned how they wanted something to show all the many things to do and to engage the consumer with eye catching artwork. The Warm Season Creative will launch in May for print then digital and social media as they unfold.

The Warm Season Campaign for print will be in the True West Magazine for May & June. This focuses on the national audience with a 2-page spread and 75, 000 impressions.

The Yellowstone/Glacier National Map explores the region for adventure, recreation, arts & culture. The pieces of artwork are fun, fresh and capture Montana history. Our banner ads are smaller, but the artwork is still very eye catching.

Our Bird Watcher's Digest ad will be out in the May/June issue and will highlight the map between the parks. This also focuses on the national audience.

There was some discussion on adding more ghost towns to the map on the ghost towns ad. There are some highlighted, but the focus is inspiration and hope to draw tourist to the website for more information.

Neala said the committee wrapped up the travel guide and it is at the printer now for 130,000 copies. The guides will be delivered on or before April 1st.

Website, social media, video, other: Katya gave a new report with information on statistics. The report compared yearly data from March 18, 2019 - March 17, 2020 to March 18, 2020 - March 17, 2021. It shows that the age of user demographics has changed this past year with a lower age bracket down to 55. The traffic to our website was 70.6% from organic searches. Overall, the traffic to our website increased by 21.3%. The biggest change was our blog integration. It has increased 201% year over year with a total of 6845-page clicks from February 12 - March 17, 2021, just over a month. We have more contact content which drives more traffic, and we have a quicker navigation system.

The displays for the Helena and Butte airports are all set up. Mike Mergenthaler expressed his thanks to Katya, everyone at Tempest Tech and Sarah. The Helena displays are wonderful and look great.

Tempest Tech is still working on the web design and will have a committee meeting soon.

Maria asked about the video shot for the region and if we can get snippets to utilize in other areas/communities. Sarah suggested we discuss this with Shawn as he does subsidize some of his work for us.

Cooperative Marketing Applications – The list of applicants and projects were shared with the group. We have \$12,000 available but have money to transfer so we do have the funds for the projects which total \$18,044.05. Jefferson County sent in an application for an event that would fall into the next fiscal year. Sarah suggested we approve depending on the Fiscal Year 2022 starting on July 1st. She suggested opening the first group for discussion.

Ross Johnson made the motion to approve the cooperative marketing requests for this fiscal year of \$18,044.05 and initially approve the Jefferson County request based on approval of the Fiscal Year 2022 budget. Seconded by Rebecca Jones.

As a reminder, there is required language on brochures. Please look over application and send to Sarah to make sure your information meets the requirements.

Other Business – Next month we will be looking at the budget for the marketing plan for Fiscal Year 2022. If you have thoughts, let Sarah know so she can take under advisement.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be on May 20th, 2021 at Fairmont Hot Springs Resort. This will be our brochure exchange meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 10:47am.

Minutes by Julie Shelton & Kerri Kumasaka