

Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

216 Park Street
PO Box 81
Gardiner MT 59030-0081

Phone: 406.848.7971
E-mail: executivedirector@gardinerchamber.com



The Gardiner Chamber of Commerce serves our community through developing local tourism while endorsing stewardship of the Yellowstone Ecosystem.

Meeting date: **Thursday, February 17th, 2022 from 12:00 PM to 1:00 PM**

Location: Gardiner Chamber of Commerce 216 Park St. Gardiner, MT & [Virtual via Zoom](#)

Purpose: Regularly Scheduled Monthly Board of Directors Meeting

Agenda:

1. Chamber Business

1.1. Roll Call & Introductions

Chelsea Deweese, Amanda Hagerty, Mike Keller, Debbie Mackey, Sarah Ondrus, Mike Skelton, Trina Smith, Sabina Strauss, and Billie Taylor

1.2 Approval of Prior Month's Meeting Minutes

Debbie Mackey made a motion to approve the minutes from the January 2022 Annual Members Meeting. Sarah Ondrus seconded the motion.

1.3 Board Member Orientation – Mike Skelton

Skelton welcomed new board members Billie Taylor and Trina Smith. He continued by listing the duties and expectations of the Gardiner Chamber Board of Directors (BOD):

- Board members are fiduciaries
- The duty of care: all decisions are made based on the prudent use of the assets of the Chamber e.g. its people, property, etc.
- The duty of loyalty: all decisions are based on the interests of the Chamber and not for personal or business benefit. Furthering that if you question that you may have a conflict of interest to speak with the Executive Committee as you may have to abstain from certain votes.
- The duty of obedience: BOD members must follow all state & local laws, the Chamber's mission statement, and the Chamber's Articles of Incorporation & Bylaws

Finally, Skelton made the Board aware that prior to the March 17, 2022, regularly scheduled meeting there will be an Executive Session beginning at 10:00 am. The purpose of the session is to discuss the 2021 financials, Chamber & CVB funding sources, and the purpose/role of the CVB.

2. Presentation

2.1 Yellowstone Forever – Lisa Diekmann, President & CEO

Presentation and Q&A

Lisa Diekmann, President & CEO of Yellowstone Forever (YF), gave a presentation speaking to the successes and current state of the organization, following the presentation was a Q&A. Below are highlights of the

presentation. The full slideshow and recording is available upon request by contacting Terese Petcoff at executivedirector@gardinerchamber.com.

- Diekmann has a history with the organization and had previously worked for the Yellowstone Park Foundation. When the position of the YF CEO opened she knew that she had to come back.
- Diekmann's goal throughout the first year was to listen, learn, and be committed to fiscal responsibility, fiscal transparency, and sustainability.
- Diekmann spoke to Hagerty's success of getting the YF Institute up and running 6 months ahead of schedule in December 2021. Since its reopening, they have hosted several programs where many special and life-changing experiences have transpired especially within the various school groups. She truly believes that the institute is the cornerstone of YF .
- Diekmann spoke to the challenges of Covid, staffing, and housing.
- Diekmann highlighted that when she started there was \$1.9 million in funding towards projects in Yellowstone National Park (YNP) and now there is \$9 million dedicated to YNP projects.
- Diekmann referenced the 2021 – 2026 YF Strategic Plan. [See full strategic plan here.](#)
- Diekmann spoke to YF finances, stating that they ended FY21 with a net income of \$3.3 million. That this was the first time since the merger (of Yellowstone Association and Yellowstone Park Foundation) that there was a net income. Additionally, they expect to end the coming fiscal year 2022, based on their budget with an income of \$25 million and a net income of \$12.8 million – noting that \$8 million of the \$25 million is specifically dedicated to YNP projects.
- Diekmann highlighted that the YF line of credit was paid off in 2021 – four years ahead of schedule.
- Looking ahead they are working on a strategic educational analysis that will influence how they will move forward in the future.
- YF has been through a strategic retail analysis. At the start of Diekmann stepping into the role, YF had approx. 1,800 skus (different retail items) and are now down to approx. 750 with an end goal of 500 – 700.
- YF's goal regarding the YNP 150th anniversary is to engage 150,000 new YF stewards and raise \$25 million in 2 years.
- YF will continue to focus on education, sustainability, trails, wildlife, and people.

3. Committee Updates

3.1 Mary Wilson – Yellowstone NPS

Wilson reported that YNP visitation for January 2022 was 28.84% higher than January 2021 and that YTD traffic in YNP is 11.08% higher than the same period last year.

Wilson also spoke to the following items. To read more about specific items please click the link to access the full press release.

- Yellowstone backcountry permits are available online for 2022. There are three options for obtaining a permit: early access lottery, general permits, & walk-up permits. [Full press release.](#)
- Advance reservations for additional YNP campgrounds. All 12 campgrounds within YNP are now reservation only. Campgrounds operated by the National Park Service (NPS) that can be reserved through Recreation.gov, include: Indian Creek, Lewis Lake, Pebble Creek, Mammoth, and Slough Creek campgrounds. 80% of these sites will be reservable 6 months in advance, the remaining 20% of sites will be available 2 weeks in advance. The campgrounds operated by YNP Lodges are also reservation only through YellowstoneNationalParkLodges.com and include: Fishing Bridge, Bridge Bay, Madison, Canyon Village, and Grant Village campgrounds. [Full press release.](#)
- NPS announced a Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a Bison Management Plan at YNP. This plan would allow NPS to evaluate bison management, explore ways to reduce the amount of bison being sent to slaughter, and continue working with the Tribal Nations and agency partners. There is a 30-day public comment period with a deadline to submit comments of February 28, 2022. [Full press release.](#)
 - Strauss asked Wilson if she could provide insight to how the plan would work, because to her understanding it is the Interagency Bison Management Partners (IMBP) that dictates the number of Bison. However, when looking at the alternatives in YNP's plan the bison numbers are much higher. Wilson will follow up once she receives more information.

- Yellowstone 2022 Youth Conservation Corps recruitment has begun and is officially back after not having the program in 2020 and 2021. The deadline for applications is March 1, 2022. [Full press release](#).
- NPS signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for an environmental assessment (EA) to improve telecommunications systems in the developed areas of Yellowstone National Park. A selected action allows for the installation of 187 miles of fiber optic cables in previously disturbed areas along park roads. Additionally, there is no plan to expand cellular coverage beyond the existing 8% coverage in YNP. [Full press release](#).
- On Monday February 14, 2022 Steamboat Geyser Erupted.
- Board of Directors Mackey and Skelton asked Mary why the removal of animal carcasses seemed to be more prominent this year than in past years. Wilson followed up with the following via email to Petcoff.
 - Carcass Removal (by Kerry Gunther, Yellowstone Center for Resources)
 - *Our objectives for moving carcasses from front country areas are:*
 - *1) Prevent habituation of carnivores to people. Ungulate carcasses are high quality foods that attract wolves and bears. Wolves and bears will tolerate people at very close distances in order to feed on ungulate carcasses. Once habituated to people, carnivores are more likely to be fed by park visitors and take a disproportionate amount of park staff time and resources to keep them out of conflicts with people. Additionally, wolves and bears that are habituated to human presence are more vulnerable to hunter harvest if they leave the protections of the park than are wolves and bears that are wary of people.*
 - *2) Reduce the chances of carnivores being struck by vehicles. Wildlife carcasses near roads attract wolves, bears, and other scavengers and can lead to frequent road crossings as carnivores approach and leave roadside carcasses, increasing the risk that they will be struck and killed by vehicles.*
 - *3) Reduce the risk of motor vehicle accidents including vehicle vs. vehicle and vehicle vs. pedestrian. Parks roads are currently covered in ice and snow at many locations. If we leave carcasses close to the road, it attracts large numbers of people and could create parking and safety hazards along a snowy/icy stretch of road. We have had people struck by vehicles at wildlife-jams in the past, some were injured quite seriously.*
 - *Carcasses next/close to the road are moved to an area where wolves and other scavengers can feed on them without disturbance by people, so the calories stay in the park and are available to park carnivores.*
 - *We believe that our carcass redistribution practice works well to reduce habituation of carnivores to people, prevent carnivore-human conflicts, and prevent human-caused carnivore mortality. Carcass redistribution is not a new practice and is something we will likely continue to use into the future.*

3.3 Terese Petcoff – Director Report

Petcoff began by announcing that the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce & CVB 2021 Annual Report was available to the public via printout and also online at VisitGardinerMT.com.

She announced a change to the original Resort Tax request for additional bear proof garbage containers and that now there would only be 4 canisters purchased rather than 5. This is because the Gardiner High School welding class will be creating and donating a container to the project. This change has been approved by the Gardiner Resort Area District (GRAD).

In January the Chamber had five new members: 406-TEX-MEX, Mountain Valley Veterinary Services, Park's Edge Retreat on the Yellowstone, Yellowstone Real Estate Group, and Yellowstone Trip Planning.

Lastly, she spoke to the changes and updates to the MT CVB Rules & Regulations. That while the updates are not officially approved until after March 12, 2022 she is excited for the FY23 Marketing Plan, as the changes create more flexibility in what the Gardiner CVB can allocate funding towards.

4. Outstanding Business

Regarding the note on the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce 216 Park St. property (main building), Skelton made the Board aware that prior to the meeting the Chamber approached the note holder inquiring to pay the note off early (the note is set to balloon in 2025) because the Chamber had received adequate funding to do

so. The note holder declined the offer and the Chamber will continue to pay the note until it balloons in February 2025. He stated that at the end of the summer season (once the Chamber receives an initial estimate of Capital Account funding from GRAD) the Chamber will run the numbers again; he believes that the Chamber will not have to receive the entire 15% GRAD Capital Account allocation in 2024 & 2025 if collections are similar to the 2021 funding. He reiterated that this is all hypothetical, and the Board will be looped in as needed.

Skelton spoke to two items that GRAD is currently discussing that may be of interest to Board Members. Note that the use of *District* below refers to the Gardiner Resort Tax Area District Boundary which can be found [here](#).

1. If private tour operators (e.g. YNP Commercial Use Authorization holders) that do not have a physical business location inside of the District need to collect and remit Resort Tax.
 - i. Skelton gave the background that when the resort tax was originally passed, all CUA holders were informed that even if their physical business location was not within the District but they conducted their business within the District (e.g. meeting or dropping off clients) they needed to collect and remit resort tax for that trip. He continued that at the recent GRAD meeting there was a waiver requested and granted to a CUA holder that did not collect and remit resort tax for 2021 because they moved out of the District. While the CUA holder's operations had not changed, they were under the impression that because of this move they did not need to collect and remit the tax.
2. If activity outfitters (e.g. rafting and horseback riding outfitters) are making reservations inside of the District but the activity takes place outside of the district, what entity needs to collect and remit the tax? Does the activity need the resort tax applied?

5. New Business

Skelton reminded the Board that at the March 17th meeting Dr. Nathan Varley will be presenting on behalf of Wild Livelihoods Coalition on the economic impact of the increased wolf hunting quota for MT districts 313 and 316 that was passed by the state of Montana has had on the area.

6. Public Comment

Date of Next Meeting: March 17, 2022, 12:00PM – 1:00PM

The minutes reflecting the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce February 17, 2022 Board of Directors meeting have been transcribed and edited from the original meeting for length and clarity. All regularly scheduled meetings are recorded and available to the public by contacting the Executive Director at executivedirector@gardinerchamber.com.