

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, March 16th, 2023 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, Brian Koski, Debbie Mackey, Mike Skelton, Billie Taylor, and Trina Smith

Excused Absence: Mike Keller and Sarah Ondrus

Unexcused Absence: Amanda Hagerty

1.2 Approval of Prior Month's Meeting Minutes

Smith motioned to approve the minutes from February 2023. Mackey seconded. Minutes approved.

2. Presentation – Alyson Roberts, Jim Dolan Public Art Project, Buffalo Rising

Roberts presented a public art proposal for Gardiner. Roberts and Dolan are interested in installing a public sculpture of 111 life-size buffalo and are offering the opportunity to the community of Gardiner.

Jim Dolan has been a sculptor for over 50 years. He has more than 170 installations across Montana and around the world. One of his most well-known Montana sculptures is the Bleu Horses herd near Three Forks.

The Buffalo Rising project is 8 years in the making and, when placed, will be one of the largest art installations in the world. It is comprised of 111 unique buffalo, creating a herd that contains males, females, and calves. The sculptures are made of recycled materials, including reclaimed metal and street sweepers.

The installation is intended for a hillside with the buffalo zigzagging up the hill as a herd. The final few buffalo are chrome colored (instead of the natural brown tones) and begin to lift off the ground. The final buffalo rises 10 feet off the ground.

Roberts played a video showing the sculptures and proposed installation concept. Each buffalo moves in the wind, nodding its head, turning its body, and waving its tail. The sculptures contain bearings and chains that allow them to move as the sculptures catch the wind.

The investment for the 111 sculptures is estimated at \$6 million, approximately \$60,000 per buffalo. This price does not include transportation and installation. Each piece has a metal frame base that will be placed into the ground and secured with concrete.

Roberts noted that studies show, investing in public art pays off in a big way for local communities. Americans for the Arts reports that every \$1 invested in non-profit art creates \$6 in tax revenue. This is in addition to dollars spent locally on food, lodging, etc.

Dolan and Roberts are presenting this proposal to the community of Gardiner in part because of the issues highlighted by the flooding last year. Roberts referenced a quote from a Gardiner business owner who noted the flood showed the danger of relying on Yellowstone National Park for tourism. Gardiner needs something for itself. Buffalo Rising will draw visitors to Gardiner year-round.

Roberts invites the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce to create a partnership with community organizations and others to work toward the fundraising and installation of Buffalo Rising. Roberts invites the board of directors to visit Dolan's studio to see the sculptures in person.

The presentation concluded and Roberts took questions/discussion from the board.

How much land is needed? 2-5 acres, depending on the landscape and position of the sculptures.

Do they light up? Not currently, but that is possible.

What is the cost of transportation and installation? Not sure of that cost.

Roberts mentioned that Dolan has the hillside of the rodeo grounds in mind and learned in the previous meeting with Chamber staff that the Chamber owns the rodeo grounds.

Could the installation partner with YNP? Christina White, Chief of External Affairs and Partnerships for YNP commented that would depend on resource damage.

White asked about the footprint of the sculptures. Roberts explained how they are secured into the ground with concrete.

How are the sculptures meant to be viewed? From a distance or walking among them? Either one. There are 3 sculptures that are not part of the herd and could be set up for public interaction while the main herd is at a distance.

Several board members have a concern for danger to wildlife with the sharp edges of the sculptures.

Can a few bison be parceled off if Gardiner cannot take them all? No, but Dolan could make different buffalo for Gardiner.

Is the installation a lease or permanent? Permanent.

Skelton notes that if the Chamber were to possibly move forward with the project, a separate organization would need to be formed. The Chamber cannot take on the project itself but instead a partnership would be formed to bring together local organizations.

What is the timeline for the project? A year or more, installed by summer 2024 or beyond.

The next step is for the Board to discuss the project to decide whether or not to move forward with it.

3. Committee Updates

3.1 Mary Wilson – Yellowstone NPS

Visitation

February visitation was down 3.35% from February 2022.

Recreation visits YTD are up 1.11% from the same time in 2022.

Winter Road Update

All interior park roads are now closed to over-snow travel and plowing has begun.

The road from the North Entrance to the Northeast Entrance remains open for wheeled vehicles.

Northeast Entrance Road

Please remind visitors that it is still winter in Yellowstone....so, be prepared and be safe!

North Entrance to Cooke City is open and snow packed and icy...winter driving conditions.

Use pullouts - do not stop in the middle of the road.

Snowplows cannot stop quickly on snow-packed/icy roads when they come around a curve and find a vehicle in the road.

Park road updates can be obtained by texting 82190 to 888-777, calling the park's Public Road Report Line at 307-344-2117, and/or visiting the Park Roads page on the park's website.

Spring Road Opening Dates

Roads will open at 8:00 am on the following dates (conditions permitting):

April 21: West Entrance to Madison Junction, Mammoth Hot Springs to Old Faithful, Norris to Canyon Village

May 5: East Entrance to Lake Village (Sylvan Pass), Canyon Village to Lake Village

May 12: South Entrance to West Thumb, Lake Village to West Thumb, West Thumb to Old Faithful (Craig Pass), Tower Junction to Tower Fall

May 26: Tower Fall to Canyon Junction (Dunraven Pass), Beartooth Highway (US-212)*

Campground Status for Summer 2023

Nine of the 12 campgrounds in Yellowstone will be open for the 2023 season (about 1,961 of 2,144 campsites or 91%).

CLOSED: Pebble Creek, Norris, Tower?? (TBD)

Lewis Lake, Indian Creek, and Slough campgrounds are OPEN for reservations at www.recreation.gov.

Campgrounds managed by our partner Yellowstone National Park Lodges are also open for reservations.

Mammoth Campground: OPEN (TBD....May 2023?)

Work continues on the new waste treatment system to serve the Mammoth area, including the hotel and campground. A small number of campsites will remain closed as the restroom facility serving these sites will not be connected to the new (temporary) wastewater system.

Watch for updates: Camping - Yellowstone National Park (U.S. National Park Service) (nps.gov)

First Grizzly Bear Sighting

On Tuesday, March 7: adult bear, 300-350 pounds, seen near remains of bison carcass in Pelican Valley.

Please advise skiers, snowshoers, hikers, etc. that they need to be "bear aware".

All of Yellowstone National Park is bear country: from the deepest backcountry to the boardwalks around Old Faithful. Protect yourself and the bears people come here to enjoy by following these guidelines:

- Prepare for a bear encounter.
- Carry bear spray, know how to use it, and make sure it's accessible.
- Stay alert.
- Hike or ski in groups of three or more, stay on maintained trails, and make noise. Avoid hiking at dusk, dawn, or at night.
- Do not run if you encounter a bear.
- Stay 100 yards (91 m) away from black and grizzly bears. Approaching bears within 100 yards is prohibited. Use binoculars, a telescope, or telephoto lens to get a closer look.
- Store food, garbage, barbecue grills, and other attractants in hard-sided vehicles or bear-proof food storage boxes.
- Report bear sightings and encounters to a park ranger immediately.
- Learn more about bear safety.

2022 State of the Park Report

Released March 1, 2023

2023 State of the Park report provides updates on each of the park's strategic priorities and spotlights the progress made by the park's teams and partners over the past two years. Highlights: response and recovery efforts during the 2022 historic flood event, commemoration of the park's 150th anniversary, improvements in workforce conditions, strengthen the Yellowstone ecosystem, improve visitor experiences, invest in aging infrastructure, and build coalitions and partnerships.

Wilson thanked the Chamber staff and Board for all we do to help keep visitors safe and better prepared for their time in Yellowstone!

3.2 Tim Schumacher – USFS

Schumacher discussed the upcoming search for volunteer Resource Advisory Committee members. He encouraged any interested persons to apply and to spread the word. The following is an excerpt from the related press release:

The Custer Gallatin National Forest is looking for volunteers to serve on one of our two Resource Advisory Committees (RACs). The Forest is recruiting to fill 15 vacancies on the Gallatin RAC and 13 vacancies on the Southern Montana RAC. Membership terms last 4 years. The Gallatin RAC covers Gallatin County, and the Southern Montana RAC covers Park, Sweet Grass, Stillwater, and Powder River counties. Each RAC is comprised of 15 people representing varied interests and areas of expertise who work collaboratively to improve working relationships among community members and National Forest personnel.

Title II of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) provides funding to counties for projects on federal lands. The main goal of each RAC is to review and recommend projects proposed by organizations, agencies, Tribal governments and individuals. Proposed projects must aim to enhance forest ecosystems and restore or improve land health or water quality on the Custer Gallatin National Forest and/or adjacent lands.

Reauthorization of the SRS allows both RACs to convene and recommend projects to the Custer Gallatin National Forest [Secure Rural Schools Program | US Forest Service \(usda.gov\)](#). Each committee can meet up to 4 times annually, but generally meets once or twice a year. Meetings last approximately 4 hours and are held in-person with virtual options if needed.

Past RACs have recommended a variety of projects including road and trail maintenance, invasive weed eradication efforts, watershed restoration projects, winter plowing and more.

Each RAC has a balanced and broad representation of interests and has vacancies in all categories. Individuals may apply to one or both RACs and are not required to reside in the counties represented. Applicants must be a Montana resident to apply. Applications are due by May 15, 2023.

If you are interested in volunteering on a RAC, please complete the AD-755 found at www.fs.usda.gov/main/pts/specialprojects/racs. Questions and applications may be directed to Tim Schumacher at timothy.schumacher2@usda.gov, 406-848-7375 or mailed to Custer Gallatin National Forest, Attn: Tim Schumacher, P.O. Box 5, Gardiner, MT 59030.

Skelton asked about the current state of the bison hunt. Schumacher stated there are about 1,400 animals harvested between hunters, car accidents, etc. The hunt is drawing to a close.

3.3 Terese Petcoff – Director's Report

Convergence Conference

First Annual Conference put on by the MT Chamber of Commerce. We (Skelton and Petoff) has been helping facilitate the Gardiner Chamber's role in the Conference and coordinating the YNP Park tour day along with NPS, Candance Strauss (with MT Chamber of Commerce, and other partners. Information on the conference has already been sent out to Chamber members but more reminders will be sent. Chamber members and the public can buy tickets to additional events at the Convergence Conference.

April Board Meeting

Petcoff reminded the Board that the annual marketing plan budget will be presented at the April Board meeting.

Lodging Tax Collections

Petcoff distributed the current Montana lodging taxes collection numbers provided by the state. Overall, numbers are down significantly for Gardiner, however, every other CVB in the Yellowstone Country region is up, aside from West Yellowstone down 4%. She noted that Gardiner is the only area down so significantly, down 58% compared to 2020, down 34% compared to 2021.

April Hours & Closing Requests

Petcoff requested that the Chamber close for spring cleaning on Monday & Tuesday, April 10 & 11, echoing what was done in 2021. No objections from the board about closing the Chamber for those days. Petcoff will put the closure in the newsletter to let the public know.

Petcoff reminded the Board that the hours will extend to closing at 5 pm on Monday, April 24th the Monday following YNP roads beginning to reopen.

3.4 Maria Koppelberger – Operations Manager’s Report

Maria had a great first month on the job and is glad to be part of the team. She has been busy, including updating the Visitor Guide directory and calling Chambers of Commerce throughout Montana about distributing the new visitor guide in May.

Facilities Maintenance Issues

The fireplace needs cleaning and she is looking into cleaning services.

Terese made her aware of prior issues with the urinal in the men’s restroom. She will continue to monitor the situation and if there are consistent issues again this summer, she will look into replacing it with a toilet stall.

Visitation for Winter 2021-2022 vs Winter 2022-2023

Overall 21% increase in visitation this winter versus last winter.

Visitors	Dec	Jan	Feb	Total
Winter 21-22	643	493	623	1,759
Winter 22-23	710	733	683	2,126

Phone Calls Winter 2022-2023 vs Winter 2022-2023

Overall 4.2% increase in phone calls this winter versus last winter.

Phone calls	Dec	Jan	Feb	Total
Winter 21-22	65	85	65	215
Winter 22-23	67	90	67	224

4. Outstanding Business

No outstanding business

5. New Business

Smith noticed that the Yellowstone Country website gives outdated information for the Gardiner area. Can that be fixed? Yes, Petcoff will get in touch with them.

Skelton noted the continuing issue of Google Maps incorrectly showing the new North Entrance Road as closed. White will reach out for a correction.

Skelton, Koski, and others brought up concerns regarding the official NPS designation as the “Temporary North Entrance Road”. Calling it “temporary” is causing problems for visitors, and therefore local businesses. Visitors read about the road online and don’t know if they can use it. Many think there are restrictions, that it’s

unsuitable for RVs, not for public use, etc. White notes that NPS has a press release planned regarding the road opening and construction updates. White will verify that it mentions that the Temporary North Entrance Road has no restrictions.

There was discussion about a road opening event. White mentioned that the Convergence Conference has a media component. It will mention that the road is open.

Petcoff encouraged everyone to reach out to Google when they see misinformation about Gardiner.

5.1 Mike Skelton – Board of Directors President

Skelton will stand up the Rodeo Grounds Committee. Taylor and Ondrus are on the committee and several more volunteers are needed. The Committee will make a report on the origin and method of acquisition, the size and legal boundaries of the rodeo grounds, the buildings, the current assessed value, and more. He has concerns about a check he found in the files. Overall, the Chamber is losing money between the taxes and insurance for the rodeo grounds. The committee will develop a plan for near-term events and use, and a long-term strategic plan for the grounds. Koski volunteers. Dewese declares a conflict of interest for herself serving on the Committee.

Skelton will propose an update to the Chamber's Policies and Procedures Manual as well as a potential new staff position for the Chamber/CVB, he will follow up via email.

Skelton is continuing to look into the issue of the parking lot out front. Who owns it? Who is responsible for it? There is a related question for GRAD tax. Do you have to pay tax if you pick up clients in the parking lot? Some guides say "no" because the parking lot is YNP land. But the Chamber pays to plow it. Is it part of the water district? If so, it's part of GRAD.

There is additional discussion about the public art proposal. Community outreach and organizational partnerships are needed. YNP would have difficulty with environmental impact. Some are concerned about safety of the public and wildlife. The installation would be an amazing draw for tourism, but there are safety issues. White mentions Mountain Time Arts will have a temporary installation again this summer in YNP.

Skelton suggested canceling the May board of Directors meeting. There was consensus that yes it should be canceled. There will be no May 18th meeting.

The April meeting will go until 1:30pm to accommodate the budget presentation.

White gave an update that IT reached out to Google regarding the misinformation. Yes, the press release will contain messaging about the North Entrance Road. There was more feedback that the name "Temporary" confuses visitors and some have rerouted their YNP trip to another entrance.

5. Public Comment

No public comment

Smith motioned to adjourn the meeting. Koski seconded. Meeting adjourned.

Date of Next Meeting: April 20, 2023 12:00PM – 1:30PM