

Gardiner Chamber of Commerce

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

Meeting date: **Thursday, July 20th, 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

Amanda Hagerty, Brian Koski, Debbie Mackey, Sarah Ondrus, Mike Skelton, and Trina Smith

Excused Absence: Billie Taylor, Mike Keller

Unexcused Absence: Chelsea Deweese

1.2 Approval of Prior Month's Meeting Minutes

Hagerty motioned to approve the minutes from June 2023. Koski seconded. 5 in favor/ 0 opposed/0 abstentions. Motion approved.

2. Guest - Mike Tranel – Yellowstone National Park Deputy Superintendent – Rescheduled to August

Mike Skelton gave the following information on behalf of Mike Tranel:

- The High Bridge will be done by the end of the month. It's taking longer than originally intended.
- The Lamar Canyon construction will continue until Fall.
- There will be delays at the new bridge off and on, with no work on Sunday so there will be a timed light.
- Overall, there is a lot of progress on the construction projects.

Skelton also noted some visitation stats for the park – June 2023 YTD topped 1 million visitors. In 2021, there were 1.1 million visitors in the same timeframe. The North Entrance is slightly behind 2021, with that year being considered an outlier due to the record-breaking visitation. In contrast, the North Gate is currently almost double the 2019 number. It's the second busiest entrance after the West Entrance.

3. Committee Updates

3.1 Mary Wilson – Yellowstone NPS

Not present

3.2 Mike Thom and Tim Schumacher – USFS

Mike Thom gave the following updates on repairs regarding the flooding events of 2022:

- The Bear Creek bridge is contracted but will not be done until summer 2024.
- Contracts are in place for trail bridges and repair in the back country, including popular trails in the backcountry of the Beartooths, and will be implemented in summer 2024.
- Cinnabar boat ramp is in the contracting phase; it has not been advertised or awarded yet. It will be done by next year.
- Regarding the timeline of projects the Forest Service received flood recovery money in March 2023, which did not give enough time to complete all projects this summer.
- Thom thanked Hunter Brogan, of Brogan's Sand and Gravel, as they have been allowing certain groups to launch from his private boat launch on his property, including rafting companies, Forest Service, and Montana FWP. Hunter has been great to work with and very helpful.

The Forest Service has been getting many questions about the project at Slip n Slide. He explained that is it wetland habitat restoration. They are tearing out high-hazard dams and getting rid of curly-leaf pondweed, an aquatic invasive that is nowhere else in the Upper Yellowstone. It's going well, the heavy equipment will be done by the end of August. In September they'll plant wetland species and then fence the area. There is currently a public closure due to the danger of heavy equipment.

Along US-89, Forest Service is working on flood control to ensure water coming down the channel goes into the central highway culvert that can handle the volume.

Aldridge Lake – Last year, Park County reestablished their access up to Aldridge. He urged staff that, if there are questions about visiting it and access, to let folks know that it is a very sketchy one lane road and can be very dangerous, especially when wet and snowy - it is not a fun route. Forest Service will be working on travel management, so people aren't disturbing the Aldridge cemetery and private property there. The road goes through 95% private land until reaching public land. While it is a legal and open route it can be quite rough . The county doesn't have further improvements planned.

Visitation – It has been busy and crowded. The camping reservation system is working well at Eagle Creek but there has been an issue with no-shows. When potential campers see the empty site in a full campground they have questions.

O.T.O Ranch – Starting in June, MSU visited for a course and a non-profit stayed at the ranch. The Pop-Up Ranch has hosted guests for 7 weeks, and will end in mid-August. They will have a public open house Saturday, August 19th, similar to last year, which was a huge success. At the end of the season, True Ranch Collection will pull out all of their infrastructure. The Forest Service will do a "reset" of the property and look at/learn what's best for the property moving forward. Forest Service will look at different types of long-term use – e.g. commercial, educational, staying the same etc. Taking out the infrastructure will level the playing field for those opportunities. There will be a change, but the challenge is determining what the right change is.

Forest Service is working on the Recreation Advisory Committee. They got applications and they're putting together the committee. In January, they will begin meeting to vote on projects. They will let the public know when project submissions are open.

Questions from member of the public Strauss:

Is there any bear activity at Aldridge?

Thom: None that's been reported.

Strauss enjoys walking to OTO when there's no vehicle traffic, so that will be by the end of August? If others are using the ranch, will Forest Service let the public know about it?

Thom: Yes, through various means.

Will there be public comment about what happens at OTO?

Thom: Yes.

Skelton asked about any conversation between Forest Service and Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) regarding Brogan's boat launch.

Thom: Yes, everything is contingent. It may not be feasible to reopen the launch in its previous placement. But have been discussions about moving it near the LuDuke Picnic area. MFWP is currently doing archeological heritage surveys of the area. Brogan's Landing is a MFWP operated site not USFS.

3.3 Terese Petcoff – Director's Report

Google Maps & Apple Maps Issue – Petcoff has reached out to about every Google chat and support forum and has continued to submit edits. She has spoken with Senator Daines's office and the Department of Commerce. She is continuing to fight this issue and when it is resolved she will notify the membership. Luckily, given the June YNP Stat numbers it does not seem to be a major cause of visitors utilizing the North Entrance Gate decline.

Petcoff shared some YNP information since Mary Wilson or Mike Tranel were unable to attend:

- YNP stats May & June comparatively - Holding strong compared to 2019 and even above.
- Lots of Road Construction – VIC staff are always reminding guests of the areas of road construction in YNP when helping them plan their day.
- Wildlife – continuing to remind visitors about best practices when it comes to wildlife.

Upcoming events

- National Night Out – August 1, Arch Park 5pm – 7:30 pm. See flyer for more information. Events also inside of YNP at Old Faithful Yurts 4-6pm, Canyon Visitor Education Center 1-5pm Mammoth Officer's Row 1-5pm. See flyer for more information.
- Illuminated Teepees – While (at the time) there has not been an official press release the illuminated teepees will be back this year. The dates they are shooting for are August 1 – 7th although they are looking at extending it over two weekends (extending may depend on funding). She explained that they want to give folks the opportunity to shoot the Teepees with the full moon occurring on August 1st. Additionally, this is not associated with the events happening at Madison on August 10 – 12 through Mountain Time Arts. Only because last year MTA was the funding source of the Illuminated Teepees. Petcoff should know more by next Tuesday and hope for a press release soon after. This past Tuesday, she sat in on a planning meeting and offered the Rodeo Grounds if it was needed, our public restroom for their folks to guide attendees to, and advertising support.
- Member Event: O.T.O Dude Ranch Open House – August 19: Press release coming soon, will also be advertising in the Gardiner Community Newsletter (GCNL)
- Member Event: Yellowstone International Arts Festival – August 2, 8 – 10 pm, they still need volunteers. Following performance is Chef on the Yellowstone. See flyer.
- Member Events: Red's Blue Goose – Lots of live music. See GCNL for details.
- Member Events: Cowboy's Live Music every Sunday.

Federal Reserve Survey – Please complete this survey. There was an email reminder sent on Monday and another one will be sent this coming Sunday. As of this past Monday, July 17th Montana only had 9 responses. The GCoC became partners on this General Business Conditions Survey late last year. She requested members scan the QR Code present to take the survey.

Property & Facilities

- Petcoff spoke to ongoing issues with the men's restroom urinal much like 2021. She noted that they will continue to monitor it and next year may be the year to replace the urinal with a toilet.
- Rodeo Ground's horse boarding pricing – She inquired if the current pricing of \$10 per stock per night was steep and suggested changing it as there had been recent comments from potential guests. She suggested changing it to \$12 per stall rented, per 24-hour period. Board members responded that this price is not high, it is very reasonable. The horse owners should be expected to clean up after their

horses. Also, they should be asked to show proof their horses are vaccinated. Petcoff will make changes to the boarding waiver agreement.

Brand MT - Yellowstone Resiliency Planning Efforts – Last working group meeting is next week. Will be provided with a completion timeline by then, but the final report should be issued in the fall.

Fran Ragsdale called around to various lodging members at the end of June and found visitor stats are comparable to 2019. Ragsdale noted from her conversations was that international visitation was up and a trend of last-minute bookings.

Petcoff has frequently gotten requests to share the entire Chamber members' mailing addresses and a contact list with members and non-members. Should we ask members to agree to this? Petcoff has not given this out but rather directed them to our website. Board members agreed that continuing to direct folks to the website is best, versus giving out a contact/ mailing list.

Skelton commented about road conditions: that currently an 11-mile stretch between Norris and Madison is being chip sealed all at once. It may take an hour for visitors to make it through that stretch one lane traffic only. Be aware of this for yourselves and visitors.

3.4 Maria Koppelberger – Operations Manager's Report

VIC

We're getting busier, and visitation is very consistent – Winter and spring visitation varied a lot depending on day of the week. Fewer questions about the road conditions and the flood.

The staff has done more training – wolves presentation from NPS wolf researcher, HRC tour and learned about the options for tourists to visit the HRC.

Visitor Stats here at the Chamber: NPS recommends the comparison to 2019 as the most recent "normal" year, unaffected by the pandemic and the flood.

For the beginning of July 1st-17th – 2019, we were getting range of 200-350 visitors per day, 2023 we're getting 300-400 visitors per day. Similar, but we're up. 2021 we were getting 800-1,000. The trends here at the Chamber are consistent with the trends in YNP – up slightly from 2019 but down from 2021.

Properties and Facilities

Rodeo Grounds - We've issued a handful of permits for parking on the rodeo grounds and Casey had the fireworks stand there. The locks are causing a lot of issues, particularly with the battery life. We ordered a different one that is rechargeable, no replacing batteries. We'll use a regular keyed lock for the East gate that we really don't use.

Hired a new cleaner! Timyco has been great, so thankful to have her working with us.

New printer – it's going well and we have more space behind the desk.

Skelton asked if we know how many visitors are coming in strictly to change clothes for rafting.

Koppelberger: No, no easy way to do that.

Ondrus: Wetsuit season is pretty much over. Rafting companies ask people to come in ready to change into their wetsuits. There has probably been a drop since Wild West moved.

4. Outstanding Business

None

5. New Business

None

6. Public Comment

Strauss noticed that Chamber board meeting minutes are missing from the website.

Petcoff: We will update those.

Member of the public, Mason, asked about road work in town, specifically regarding 5th street.

Skelton: That question is best for the county. However, yes, there are various projects in the works: Main St, Stone St, 5th St. (DSA), and possibly more. We have even had private citizens filling potholes. Reach out to the county about concerns with the roads. Others noted concerns and complaints from visitors and customers.

Koski asked about the possibility of reduced plowing this coming winter.

Petcoff: No, no change in plowing is planned by the county.

Skelton stressed Tranel will attend next meeting and reiterated meeting date and time.

Mackey motioned to adjourn the meeting. Ondrus seconded. 5 in favor/0 opposed/0 abstentions. Motion approved.

Date of Next Meeting: August 17, 2023, 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM