

HOME ON THE RANGE:
HERITAGE-BASED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN A
NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMY

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

The modern American Mountain West is a contested space, environmentally and socially, and the natural and cultural amenities at the heart of the region's economy act as both providers and dividers. What was once considered the "Last Frontier" is now touted as the "Last Best Place" for its rugged landscapes and small-town sensibilities.¹ Overtime, the perspective on how to utilize these resources has changed and rural areas dependent on extractive industries have had to adapt in order to survive.

Through the lens of White Sulphur Springs, a town of 925 residents in Central Montana, this work explores the ways in which remote communities in the West adapt in the face of a changing regional narrative. White Sulphur Springs represents a community at a crossroads. Despite its newfound identity as an off-the-beaten-track vacation destination, its history and economy are firmly rooted in natural resources. This thesis demonstrates that the key to success for these communities is to take advantage of growth opportunities that are consistent with the post-industrial trajectory of the region's economy. Locally-focused programs, such as Main Street Montana, can help towns achieve this by highlighting their natural resource-based heritage.

¹ The term "Last Best Place" was coined by William Kittredge, a professor emeritus of creative writing at the University of Montana, while co-editing *The Last Best Place: A Montana Anthology* with Annick Smith in 1998. Over the past twenty years, the phrase has been widely used to promote Montana's unique sense of pristine wilderness and authentic small town character.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Though a small-town Westerner at heart, Michelle has had the unique opportunity to live in a broad range of places across the United States and the Atlantic. After spending her first two years of life in Eagan, Minnesota, Michelle's childhood was split between Texas, England, California, Idaho, Nevada, and eventually Washington state. Michelle attended Everett High School in Everett, Washington, an industrial port city north of Seattle. Upon graduating with honors in 2011, she continued her education at Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana. With the generous assistance provided by the Tulane Academic Achievement Award and Historic Everett's Margaret Riddle Historic Preservation Scholarship, Michelle pursued a double major in History and Communication and a minor in Art History. Eager to apply her learning outside of the classroom, Michelle completed her undergraduate studies early in the fall of 2014.

Following graduation, Michelle accepted a position as an AmeriCorps VISTA with Montana State University-Northern and the Human Resources Development Council in Havre, Montana, "the Pride of the Hi-Line" on the state's Canadian border. In addition to her full-time AmeriCorps service, Michelle volunteered as an intern with the Hill County Historic Preservation Commission from 2015 to 2016. Michelle's time living in rural Montana reaffirmed her passion for small towns and her interest in pursuing historic preservation at the graduate-level.

In August of 2016, Michelle moved to Ithaca, New York to begin her studies in Historic Preservation Planning at Cornell University. During her time at Cornell,

Michelle worked as a teaching assistant in the College of Architecture, Art, and Planning and served on the boards of the Cornell Association for Preservation Technology and the Cornell Women's Planning Forum. During the interim summer of her program, Michelle completed an internship with Historic Ithaca, Inc., in which she assisted with the planning and implementation of a variety of heritage tourism activities throughout Tompkins County. Upon finishing her coursework in the spring of 2018, Michelle accepted a position as Cultural Resources Planner at Page & Turnbull, Inc. in Sacramento, California. Michelle will receive her Master of Arts degree in Historic Preservation Planning on December 31, 2018.

This thesis is dedicated to the people and places of Montana that sparked my sense of adventure, showed me that driving two hours for Chinese food is a great way to spend a Thursday night, and reminded me how tough I am.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION: PRIDE, PLACE, AND PRODUCTIVITY.....	1
CHAPTER 1: THE NOT-SO-WILD WEST.....	10
CHAPTER 2: WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, MONTANA.....	39
CHAPTER 3: A NEW ERA OF NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION.....	80
CHAPTER 4: LOCAL RESOURCES AND CREATIVE SOLUTIONS.....	99
CHAPTER 5: THE MONTANA MAIN STREET APPROACH.....	121
CONCLUSION.....	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	147

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I.1	A 2017 map of Montana demonstrating the location of White Sulphur Springs.....	5
I.2	A December 2017 view of downtown White Sulphur Springs, looking southwest on Main Street.....	5
I.3	Map of White Sulphur Springs featuring the location of four local businesses to be discussed.....	9
1.1	2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes.....	13
1.2	Frontier and Remote (FAR) ZIP Code Areas using data from the U.S. Census Bureau.....	15
1.3	Census Regions and Divisions of the United States	18
1.4	Natural Amenities Scale.....	24
1.5	A December 2017 view of a ghosted Levi's sign on the side of the Parberry Building, located at 20 East Main Street in downtown White Sulphur Springs.....	38
1.6	A December 2017 street view of the signage on the Parberry Building.....	39
2.1	A 2017 view of downtown White Sulphur Springs, looking northeast on Main Street.....	39
2.2	A map of Montana demonstrating the location of White Sulphur Springs.....	42
2.3	A winter 2017 view of grain silos at the edge of White Sulphur Springs.....	42

2.4	A July 2016 view of the Castle Mountains in the southeastern part of Meagher County.....	43
2.5	A December 2017 view of the Stockmen Bar, located at 117 East Main Street, White Sulphur Springs.....	45
2.6	A 2017 view of the Byron R. Sherman House, also known as "The Castle".....	45
2.7	Early view of White Sulphur Springs with the Byron R. Sherman House on the horizon.....	46
2.8	Formal portrait of Thomas Francis Meagher in Uniform in 1864.....	47
2.9	Members of the Meagher County Historical Association stand in the former Union League of America Hall in White Sulphur Springs.....	49
2.10	An 1880's view of Jonas Higgins' store (far left) sticking out into Main Street of White Sulphur Springs.....	52
2.11	A December 2017 view of the neon sign above the Spa Hot Springs Motel, a visual landmark at the corner of Main Street and 3rd Avenue in downtown White Sulphur Springs.....	53
2.12	Population of Montana.....	58
2.13	Population of Meagher County, Montana.....	58
2.14	Population of White Sulphur Springs, Montana.....	59
2.15	Age of Meagher County, Montana Residents.....	60
2.16	Age of White Sulphur Springs, Montana Residents.....	60
2.17	A December 2017 view of the Meagher County Courthouse in downtown White Sulphur Springs.....	63

2.18	A December 2017 view of Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail barn quilts near the Teslow grain elevator on the edge of town.....	77
2.19	A December 2017 view of newly installed lamppost and a Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail barn quilt at Meagher Motor.....	78
2.20	A December 2017 view of the Jim Dolan horse sculpture on Main Street in White Sulphur Springs.....	78
3.1	White Sulphur Springs business owners and residents show support for the Black Butte Copper Project.....	79
4.1	A December 2017 view of the Red Ants Pants storefront and headquarters located at 206 East Main Street in downtown White Sulphur Springs.....	100
4.2	Country singers Hayes Carll and Corb Lund performing at the 2016 Red Ants Pants Music Festival.....	106
4.3	A 2016 view of "Red" the ant on the grain elevators in downtown Havre, Montana.....	107
4.4	Bassets Leroy and Stanley of White Sulphur Springs' 2 Basset Brewery.....	109
4.5	The Montana Brewer's Trail Map.....	111
4.6	Stanley posing for the "Breaking Basset" farmhouse ale.....	113
4.7	Beer-themed barn quilt installed on the exterior of 2 Basset Brewery in March 2018.....	114
4.8	A 2017 view of Twin Sisters Trading Company in White Sulphur Springs.....	119
5.1	Downtown Thompson Falls, Montana.....	133

INTRODUCTION

PRIDE, PLACE, AND PRODUCTIVITY

“I want to make rural America sexy again.”

—Sarah Calhoun, Founder of Red Ants Pants
Huffington Post interview, 2016

Gold was discovered in Montana’s Big Belt Mountains in the fall of 1864.

Named for the veteran soldiers who chanced upon the precious metal, Confederate Gulch became an overnight success. Diamond City, the ramshackle boomtown that emerged in its wake was described as “the richest, gayest, roughest, noisiest and cussedest place in the Montana Territory.”² Like from the reels of an old western film, vigilantes and outlaws ran rampant through this place for nearly two decades. But, as with most of Montana’s early mining settlements, the town dried up as soon as the gold did.

The county seat of Meagher County was relocated from Diamond City to White Sulphur Springs in 1880. Unlike its rowdier older brother, White Sulphur Springs emanated a softer way of life. At the turn of the 20th century, White Sulphur Springs was poised to become Montana’s premier middle-class leisure destination, complete with a mineral hot springs resort, railway access to the Milwaukee Road, and a first-rate location on a major thoroughfare, halfway between Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks. In subsequent decades, the Great Depression thwarted plans

² Meagher County Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early Day Pictorial History, 1867-1976*, (White Sulphur Springs: Meagher County News, 1968), 4.

for expanding local tourism, and the town settled into its identity as a logging and ranching community.

Today, White Sulphur Springs is home to more cows than people, 8.2 cows per person to be exact.³ Little more than a dot on the map in the scenic Smith River Valley, not much has changed in White Sulphur Springs over the past century. Every summer for the past seven years, however, this town of 925 residents has blossomed to well over 10,000. The annual Red Ants Pants Festival welcomes the best in country music, cowboy poetry, and local crafts, as well as thousands of dedicated fans that come from all over the West. Festival-attendees often choose to come back throughout the year to “float” the Smith River, to hunt for elk during the crisp fall months, to try the new IPA at the craft-brewpub on Main Street, and to experience a whole host of other attractions. Some might say that White Sulphur Springs has been discovered.

Statement of Purpose

This thesis explores the ways in which rural communities, particularly those located in the Mountain West, promote lasting economic growth and stability through heritage-based economic and community development. Employing a case study approach, this report focuses on White Sulphur Springs, an agricultural community in the heart of central Montana (Figures I.1 and I.2). White Sulphur Springs has encountered many of the challenges faced by other remote towns in the rural West,

³ Kim Hamm (local photographer and Vice President of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

including disinvestment, aging infrastructure, and persistent outmigration.

Nevertheless, dedicated residents, business owners, and nonprofit leaders are seeing to it that White Sulphur Springs reinvents itself for the next generation.

The town's development interests appear to have reached a crossroads. An abundance of nearby outdoor recreation opportunities, community-led reinvestment in the town's historic Main Street, and the presence of a nationally renowned country music festival are contributing to White Sulphur Springs' new-found identity as a rustic getaway for urban Montanans. Although these activities have sparked renewed interest in the community as a tourist destination, residents agree that tourism alone cannot sustain the local economy.

Concurrently, White Sulphur Springs and the surrounding county are experiencing a new wave of natural resource development, one that revisits the area's mining past. Sandfire Resources America, Inc., formerly Tintina Resources, Inc., has proposed the excavation of an extensive copper deposit just 17 miles north of town. This project is likely to induce drastic change, in terms of the population, the demand for goods and services, and the downtown built environment. While the proposed mine has received considerable opposition from statewide environmental groups, it has garnered overwhelming local support for its potential benefit to the county's tax base.

The key to White Sulphur Springs' long-term success will be finding harmony between the community's growing tourism sector and its long-standing extractive industries. Taking these developments into consideration, this thesis serves as a

toolkit of best practices for rural communities striving to promote diversified economic growth while maintaining local heritage and sense of place.

Through discussions with White Sulphur Springs residents it is evident that historic preservation is integral to this shared vision. Statewide programs, such as Main Street Montana, provide the necessary framework for helping small towns adapt their historic structures into functional commercial spaces for new businesses. Pride in place begins with productivity—productivity in White Sulphur Springs can be achieved by making use of local products, buildings, and entrepreneurial spirit. Several such enterprises have been initiated in recent years, three of which will be examined in greater detail in this thesis.

The results of this investigation have broader implications for historic preservation and tourism throughout the Mountain West. White Sulphur Springs is one of countless small towns dotting the otherwise sparsely settled landscape of the Western interior. Many such places lack the necessary financial resources to maintain their historic structures, let alone the stable businesses to fill them. Remoteness and steady population decline further amplify these challenges. Historic preservation exists within a framework of social and economic factors, including the health of local primary industries. Development of agricultural and mineral resources, when carried out in sustainable fashion, can regenerate the community. This is a critical piece when considering that the production of raw materials is the lifeblood of many rural economies.



Figure I.1: A 2017 map of Montana demonstrating the location of White Sulphur Springs. From the author.



Figure I.2: A December 2017 view of downtown White Sulphur Springs, looking southwest on Main Street. From the author.

Methodology

Several data collection methods were used in preparing this thesis, taking full advantage of primary and secondary sources. Initial research began with books and scholarly articles accessible within the Cornell University Library system. These sources were used to explore regional industry and population trends and establish common threads between White Sulphur Springs and other Mountain West communities. The Meagher County Public Library, the Meagher County Historical Society, and the many texts written by local historian Lee Rostad provided valuable information and images that contributed to the chapters pertaining to White Sulphur Springs. Additionally, interviews with residents, business owners, and government representatives provided a local perspective on the community's development priorities.

Limitations

The scope of information gathered for this investigation was influenced by several limitations. First, the remote location of White Sulphur Springs constrained the amount of time available for in-person data collection. A week-long site visit was conducted in December of 2017, at which time interviews with local business owners and government officials were carried out. Meetings were also held with a representative from the Montana Main Street program based in nearby Helena, Montana. All other correspondence was conducted remotely. Second, prior to the start of this investigation, very little scholarly research existed for White Sulphur Springs and the surrounding area. Recent Growth Policy Plans for White Sulphur

Springs and Meagher County, local history texts, and personal accounts proved invaluable in providing an economic and social context for this study.⁴

When applying the findings presented in this thesis, the reader should keep in mind that every small town has its own unique characteristics and priorities. Despite geographic similarities, White Sulphur Springs does not represent the situation of all rural communities in Montana, let alone the Mountain West. However, this work may serve as a jumping-off point for cultivating economic development strategies.

Chapter Overview

This thesis is organized into five chapters, followed by a conclusion. Chapter 1 will explore regional demographic trends over the past half-century. The first half of this chapter will address the varied economic and social challenges that face contemporary rural communities, with a geographic focus on the Northern Plains and the Mountain West. Conversely, the second half will discuss the emergence of the so-called “New West.” Scholars and journalists have adopted this term to identify nodes of rapid population growth in areas that are rich in natural-resource amenities.⁵ This chapter will examine the nature of this population influx and its implications for prototypical “Old West” communities on the fringe of development, such as White Sulphur Springs.

⁴ A Growth Policy Plan is a strategic planning document prepared by local governments in Montana. In 1999, the Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 97 (76-1-601, MCA), which changed the name of the report from “Master Plan” to “Growth Policy Plan.” The law dictates the minimum requirements for the policies, though individual communities reserve the right to determine where or not to adopt them.

⁵ Robbins, P., Meehan, K., Gosnell, H., & Gilbertz, S. J. (2009). “Writing the New West: A Critical Review.” *Rural Sociology*, 74(3), 356-382.

Chapter 2 will introduce the case study community. This will provide an overview of White Sulphur Springs' history and past tourism efforts, followed by an analysis of the town's current planning agenda. Chapters 3 and 4 will center on four businesses that are new to White Sulphur Springs: Sandfire Resources America, Inc., Red Ants Pants, 2 Basset Brewery, and Twin Sisters Trading Company (Figure I.3). These businesses were chosen for their age, their emphasis on employing local materials and staff, and for the industries that they represent, which include mineral extraction, arts and culture, brewing, and outdoor recreation. The final chapter will explore the various preservation, tourism, and economic development tools and incentives available at the state-level through Montana Main Street and the ways in which they could be implemented in White Sulphur Springs.

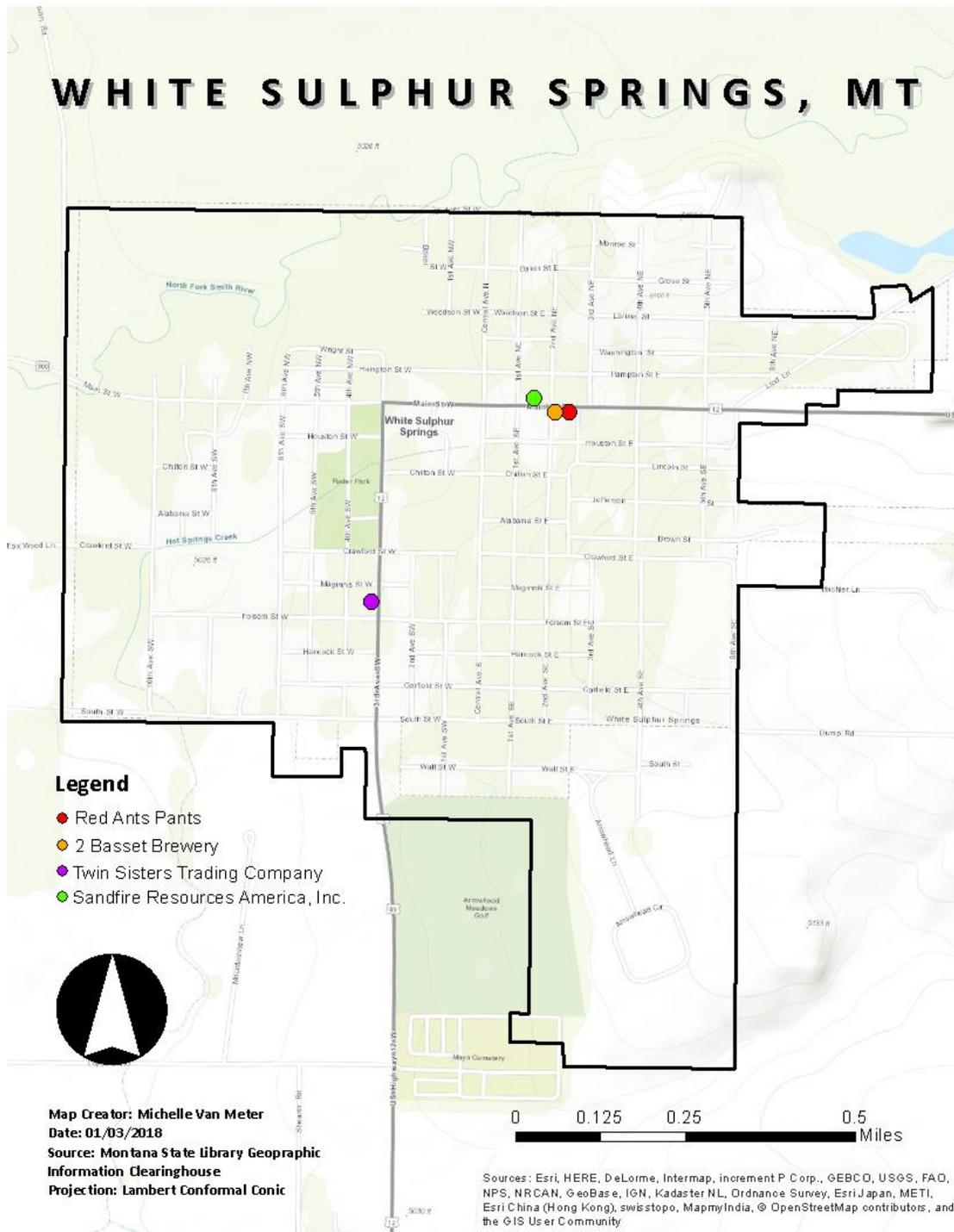


Figure I.3: Map of White Sulphur Springs featuring the location of four local businesses to be discussed. From the author.

CHAPTER 1

THE NOT-SO-WILD WEST

Corb Lund, a country-western troubadour hailing from Southern Alberta, sings a woeful tune about a modern family ranch, the “S Lazy H,” that has fallen on hard times. The song begins with a young brother and sister and follows their journey into adulthood. The brother, whose aspirations had always been tied to carrying on his family’s legacy of raising cattle, passed up on going to college so that he could help his parents. The sister, on the other hand, moved out East, went to school, and eventually married an attorney. After their parents’ passing, the brother and sister argued over who would inherit the property, the sister and her husband knowing full-well its real-estate value. The brother tries to press on with his half of the land, but laments the imminent development that has already swallowed up much of the neighboring countryside. “There will soon be rows of houses, on that ridge over there,” Lund sings.⁶ “S Lazy H” captures not only the trials and tribulations of a 21st century rancher, but also our society’s changing views on the proper use of the rural landscape and the disappearance of a traditional way of life.

The West is changing, and many natural-resource-dependent communities face difficult decisions on how to engage with the changing need for what they provide. Attractive natural and human environments continue to serve as resources to be bought and sold as of right, and used in any fashion. From a preservation perspective,

⁶ Corb Lund, *S Lazy H* (Nashville: New West Records, 2015), <http://www.newwestrecords.com/releases/things-that-cant-be-undone>.

the land and the towns that occupy it hold different meanings for different people. For a longtime resident of a small town in Montana, Main Street may be a place to conduct business and socialize, while for a visitor it might be a place to experience the vernacular architecture of the Old West. There is no simple answer, but it is in the interest of both long-time residents and newcomers that the two visions of the future are not at odds with each other.

The aim of Chapter 1 is to provide a regional context for the case study community, White Sulphur Springs. The chapter will begin by defining the rural West and identifying the challenges that rural areas face. The discussion will then shift to examining the ways in which the Mountain West is quickly evolving. Beginning with the widespread rural population turnaround of the 1970's, the scope and trajectory of in-migration to non-metropolitan areas will be detailed. As opposed to relocating for an occupation in a particular industry, as may have historically been the case, newcomers are choosing the Rocky Mountain states for an amenity-driven lifestyle. Because much of the recent population growth in the Mountain West is associated with the availability of outdoor activities and recreational opportunities, the debate over natural resources is at the forefront of planning conversations throughout the greater region and disproportionately impacts rural communities.

Defining Rural

The lack of a universal definition of “rural” is in part due to the diversity of rural American places. In fact, 17% to 49% of the national population is considered rural, depending on which definition is used.⁷ The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides the most classifications for types of rurality, capturing counties that fall into diverse population categories, ranging from the frontier to centers of micropolitan activity.

The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the USDA has developed several different metrics for the quantification and visualization of non-metropolitan areas. At the county level, these include the Rural-Urban Continuum Code and the Urban-Influence Code, both of which were updated in 2013. The Rural-Urban Continuum Code places metropolitan and non-metropolitan counties on a rural to urban scale based on the size of their metropolitan areas, if any, and their adjacency to other urbanized counties.⁸ Figure 1.1 depicts a high concentration of completely rural, non-adjacent counties situated immediately east of the Rocky Mountains. The Urban-Influence Code varies slightly, with a shifted interest towards the size of the largest urban center within each county.⁹

⁷ John Cromartie and Shawn Bucholtz, “Defining the ‘Rural’ in Rural America,” United States Department of Agriculture, *Amber Waves*, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, May 2018, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2008/june/defining-the-rural-in-rural-america/>.

⁸ Timothy Parker, “Documentation,” United States Department of Agriculture, October 12, 2016, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes/documentation/>.

⁹ Timothy Parker, “Documentation,” United States Department of Agriculture, November 27, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/urban-influence-codes/documentation/>.

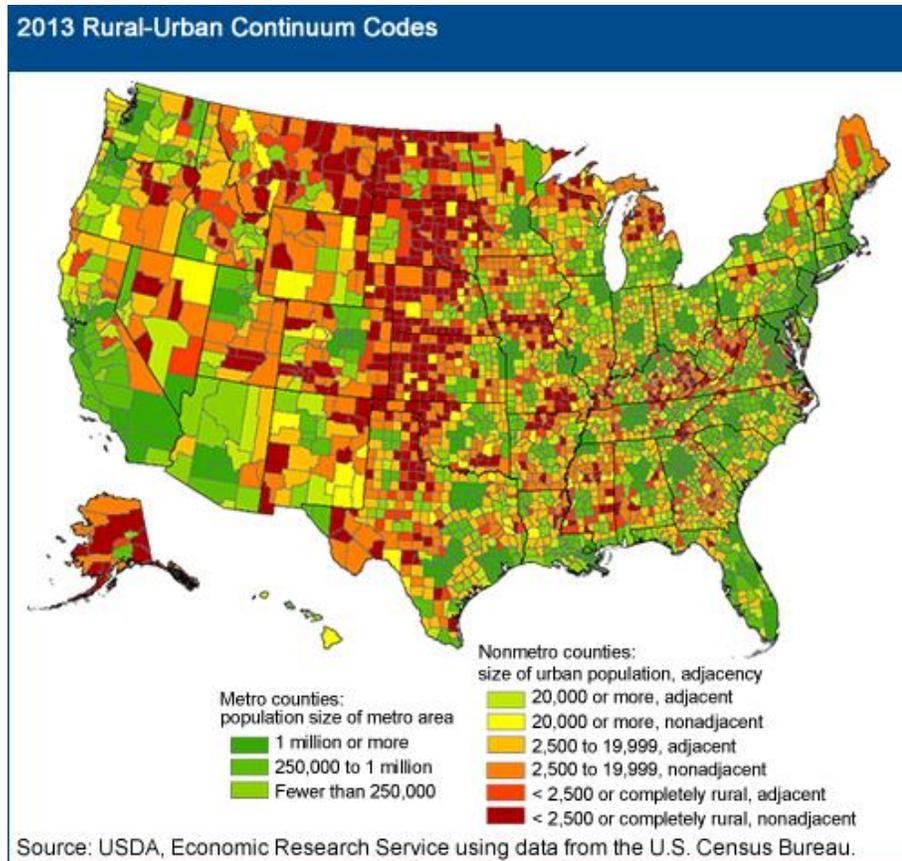


Figure 1.1: Timothy Park, 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. From the United States Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-continuum-codes/documentation/>.

At the sub-county level, the ERS provides scales for Rural-Urban Commuting Areas and for Frontier and Remote Areas. These sub-county datasets are useful because they recognize the limitations of county-level aggregation in determining community-specific eligibility for funding and assistance programs. The Rural-Urban Commuting Area Code uses Census tract data to measure commuter flows and the interconnectedness of metropolitan and micropolitan centers with outlying territories.¹⁰ Knowing that small town size coupled with remoteness can amplify economic

¹⁰ John Cromartie, "Documentation," United States Department of Agriculture, October 12, 2016, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes/documentation/>

challenges, the ERS developed the Frontier and Remote Areas Code (FAR), which identifies ZIP codes that are distant even from small population centers. The most remote ZIP codes, FAR Level Four, are those more than 15 minutes away from a town of 2,500 people.¹¹ Figure 1.2 shows that most of these extreme frontier ZIP codes are concentrated in the Western interior, with a high density in Montana east of the Northern Rocky Mountains. Figures 1.1 and 1.2 illuminate the sparsity of the Mountain West's population, and underscore that rural definitions are not one-size-fits-all for every region. Meagher County is completely rural and non-adjacent, according to the Rural-Urban Continuum Code, and White Sulphur Springs is considered a FAR Level Four community. For context, White Sulphur Springs is 75 miles away from the nearest traffic light.¹²

¹¹ John Cromartie and David Nulph, "Documentation," United States Department of Agriculture, August 9, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/frontier-and-remote-area-codes/documentation/>.

¹² Mountainview Medical Center, "Home," Mountainview Medical Center, <http://www.mvmc.org/index.html>.

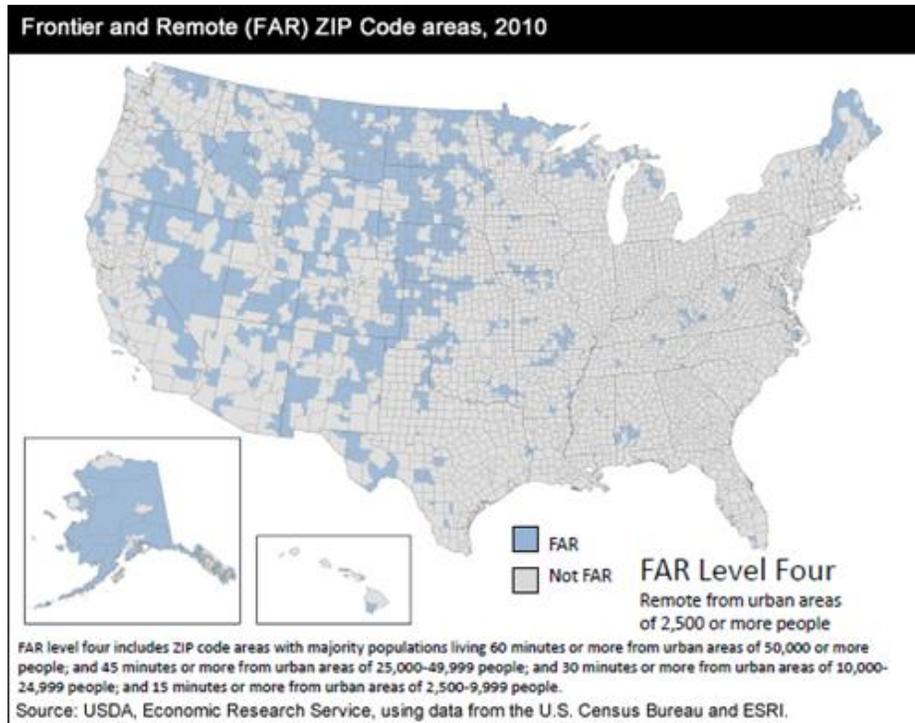


Figure 1.2: John Cromartie and David Nulph, Frontier and Remote (FAR) ZIP Code Areas, 2010. From the United States Department of Agriculture, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/frontier-and-remote-area-codes/documentation/>.

Demographically, “rural” can typically be characterized as an area of relatively sparse population that is economically dependent on the natural environment, whether that be for productive or consumptive purposes.¹³ In his article “A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Rural Places,” Emery N. Castle, former applied economics professor at Oregon State University, explains that the health of rural America is defined by four different types of capital: natural, created, human, and social.¹⁴ The latter three are highly dependent on the first. Castle states that “natural capital is that part of the natural environment capable of contributing directly or indirectly to human satisfaction.

¹³ Emery N. Castle, “A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Rural Places,” *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 80 (August 1998): 621-622.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 622.

It may be used in forestry or farming as production input or to provide satisfaction in consumption or the provision of natural amenities.”¹⁵ Nowhere is this so apparent as the rural places of the American Mountain West.

Scholars generally agree that rural characteristics and issues transcend political boundaries.¹⁶ In his discussion on addressing rural challenges on a regional-level in “Ad Hoc Regionalism for Rural Development,” Max Lu, a geography professor at Kansas State University, describes three different types of rural territories. The “Paternalistic Countryside” is dominated by profitable, large-scale agricultural businesses or extractive industries.¹⁷ On the other end of the spectrum, the “Marginal Countryside” consists of remote areas that do not have the economies of scale to be viable competitors to the “Paternalistic Countryside.”¹⁸ In the case of many places along the I-25 corridor passing through Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana, the “Contested Countryside” is defined by proximity to regional metropolitan areas, attractive natural amenities, and high population growth.¹⁹ Depending on how the community is framed, White Sulphur Springs demonstrates characteristics of all three.

Geography of the Rural West

The geography of the American West is just as diverse as the people who live there, and its boundaries are constantly shifting in response to intangible forces, such as

¹⁵ Ibid., 622.

¹⁶ Max Lu, “Ad Hoc Regionalism in Rural Development,” *The Geographical Review* 101, no. 3 (July 2011): 337.

¹⁷ Ibid., 340.

¹⁸ Ibid., 340.

¹⁹ Ibid., 340.

its regional sense of place.²⁰ From a historical standpoint, the West is often synonymous with the 19th century frontier depicted in popular culture. By and large, this translation of the West comprises the vast land mass between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean, or the “Great West.”²¹ The modern-day bureaucratic definition of the West includes all states encompassing and west of the Rocky Mountains, further delineated by location, environment, and shared cultural identity. The United States Census Bureau classifies the sub-regions of the West as “Pacific” and “Mountain” (Figure 1.3).²² While this study is primarily interested in the Mountain West, the geographic and social distinction between the Mountain West and its neighbors is fluid. This is particularly evident when examining the demographic characteristics of Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado. These states share many population and industry traits in common the West North Central states, especially in counties east of the Rocky Mountains.

²⁰ William R. Travis, et al., *Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a Changing Region*, ed. William Riebsame, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 46.

²¹ Bill Lane Center for the American West, *Bridging the Distance: Common Issues of the Rural West*, ed. David B. Danbom (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2015), 8.

²² United States Census Bureau, “Geography,” United States Census Bureau, 2010, https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/gtc/gtc_census_divreg.html

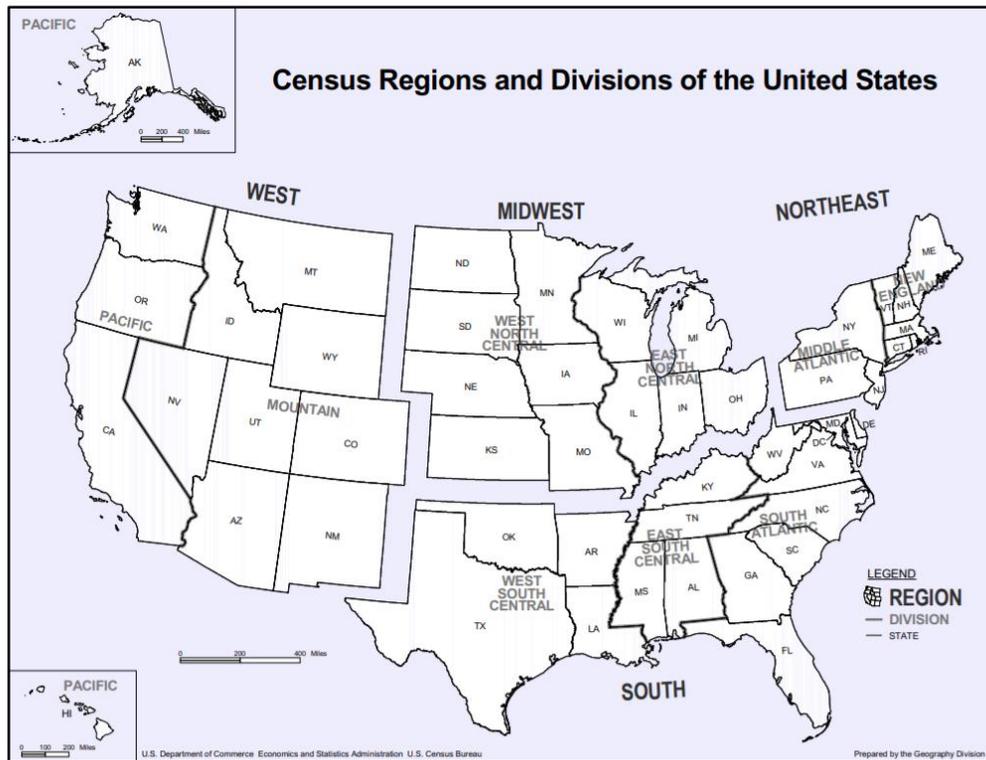


Figure 1.3: Census Regions and Divisions of the United States. From the United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/gtc/gtc_census_divreg.html.

Rural Challenges

Researchers have long studied the “hollowing-out” of rural America.

Resource-dependent counties in America’s heartland are losing population at alarming rate, largely as a result of increased efficiency in agricultural production and the steady retreat of extractive industries. Population decline in rural areas is accelerated by natural decrease. Young people who choose to migrate out of their rural hometowns confer their child-bearing years upon their new locations. In turn, the remaining population of rural areas tends to skew towards an older demographic.²³

²³ Evelyn D. Ravuri, “Straddling the Great Divide: Migration and Population Change in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains,” *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy* 3, no. 3 (2008): 5.

Although a lack of economic opportunities has played a major role in rural out-migration over the past century, there are various other quality of life factors at play. By and large, the counties that exhibit the worst symptoms of decline are typically those that are geographically isolated.²⁴

In what William Wycoff, a geography professor at Montana State University, refers to as the “Waning West,” many rural Western counties are home to fewer people than they were eighty years ago.²⁵ In discussing the rural West’s 20th-century population losses, he states:

Generally speaking, farming and natural resource extraction became less important in the post-1920 economy while those communities oriented around value-added manufacturing, urban services, mass consumption, and recreational activities prospered.²⁶

Wycoff suggests that the success of the West is driven by capitalism, and what capitalism favors is always changing.²⁷ Western communities that did not establish themselves as population centers, early on, have remained stagnant in population, lost population, or have disappeared altogether.

²⁴ David A. McGranahan, John Cromartie, and Timothy R. Wojan, “The Two Faces of Rural Population Loss Through Outmigration,” *Amber Waves*, United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service 8, no. 4 (December 2010), 40,

<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/121431/files/05RuralPopulation.pdf>.

²⁵ William Wycoff, “Life on the Margin: The Evolution of the Waning West,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 52, no. 3 (Autumn 2002), 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

A Rural Renaissance?

The suburbanization of post-war America has been extensively documented and analyzed across disciplines. Despite the mass migration of individuals and families from major cities to so-called “bedroom communities” that marked the 1950’s and 1960’s, most of this population movement remained within metropolitan counties and adjacent non-metropolitan counties.²⁸ Furthermore, while net-population growth was being felt across counties with a diverse range of population densities, urban centers were still growing at a much faster rate than rural areas for much of the 20th century.²⁹ Then, a demographic “phenomenon unknown in the modern era” was detected in the 1970’s as more Americans were “moving into non-metro counties than out of them.”³⁰ The most surprising feature of this rural “turnaround” was that money appeared to not be the key determinant in non-metropolitan migration choices.³¹ Whereas sparsely populated non-metropolitan counties experienced stagnant growth or population loss during the 1960’s, the same counties experienced high in-migration compared to metropolitan areas in the succeeding decade.³²

This unprecedented shift in urban-to-rural migration was documented by Calvin L. Beale, former demographer at the USDA, in “The Population Turnaround in Rural and Small Town America.” While the rural population turnaround described by Beale was felt nationwide, the highest density, after Florida, was concentrated in the

²⁸ Calvin L. Beale, “The Population Turnaround in Rural and Small Town America,” *Policy Studies Review* 2, no. 1 (August 1982): p. 43-45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

³² *Ibid.*, 43-44.

West.³³ He characterized the in-migrants as 46% young adults, 94% white, and predominately high-skilled professional workers.³⁴ Beale suggested that while the in-migrants were facilitated by their financial means, they were socially motivated to move to rural areas, arguing that “a large reserve of people had developed negative views about life in major or older metro areas, and/or a positive image of the quality of life in rural areas or small towns.”³⁵

Beale’s paper marked one of the first observations of what would later be a topic of discussion in the “New West.” He forecasted some of the undesirable consequences associated with rapid growth in non-metropolitan areas. Some locations are growing too fast for local governments to effectively manage. The physical manifestation of this growth, in turn, negatively impacts traditionally productive land.³⁶ Beale accurately described the rural policy challenge being faced today: “it is necessary to focus simultaneously on small agricultural communities of continued demographic decrease at one extreme and non-agricultural rural areas of rapid growth at the other.”³⁷ In the following sections, the divide between these two extremes, geographically and socially, and the contested zone where the two worlds collide, comes to the fore in the “New West.”

³³ Ibid., 45.

³⁴ Ibid., 50-52.

³⁵ Ibid., 52.

³⁶ Ibid., 53.

³⁷ Ibid., 53.

Rural Growth and Amenities

The ebb and flow of the Mountain West's rural population has been historically tied to the extraction of natural resources. Today, the aesthetic and recreational advantages of those same natural resources, as well as cultural resources, increasingly drives population growth in the region.

In his frequently cited report, "Natural Amenities Drive Rural Population Change," David A. McGranahan, an economist at the USDA, discussed the increasing influence of natural amenities on rural migration between 1969 and 1996.

McGranahan explained the trend in stating that "where natural resources once attracted people seeking fertile land, minerals, and timber, they now attract people in search of a pleasant environment."³⁸ Areas that have historically depended on natural resources for extractive purposes are increasingly focused on recreation, retirement, and information-based industries.³⁹ Whereas rural areas with few natural amenities grew by an average of 1% over the twenty five-year study period, natural amenity-rich counties, as a group, nearly doubled in population.⁴⁰

Prior to McGranahan's report, no definitive index for the measurement of natural amenities existed. Several researchers had attempted to measure such characteristics but received mixed results because of their use of state-level data or their focus on retirement counties.⁴¹ McGranahan defines an amenity as "an attribute

³⁸ David A. McGranahan, "Natural Amenities Drive Rural Population Change," Food and Rural Economics Division, United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Economic Report no. 781 (September 1999), 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, iii.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

that enhances a location as a place of residence.”⁴² Thus, he quantified natural amenities by assigning a scale to variables related to climate, topography, and the presence of surface water at the county-level. McGranahan acknowledged that his index excludes man-made amenity features, such as historic sites, that might also add to a location’s desirability.⁴³ Ultimately, the six factors used in determining high-natural amenity score were warm winters, winter sun, temperate summer, low summer humidity, topographic variation, and water area.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, the Western states, those encompassing the Rocky Mountains and westward, scored the highest on the natural amenity scale (Figure 1.4).

⁴² Ibid., 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2-4.

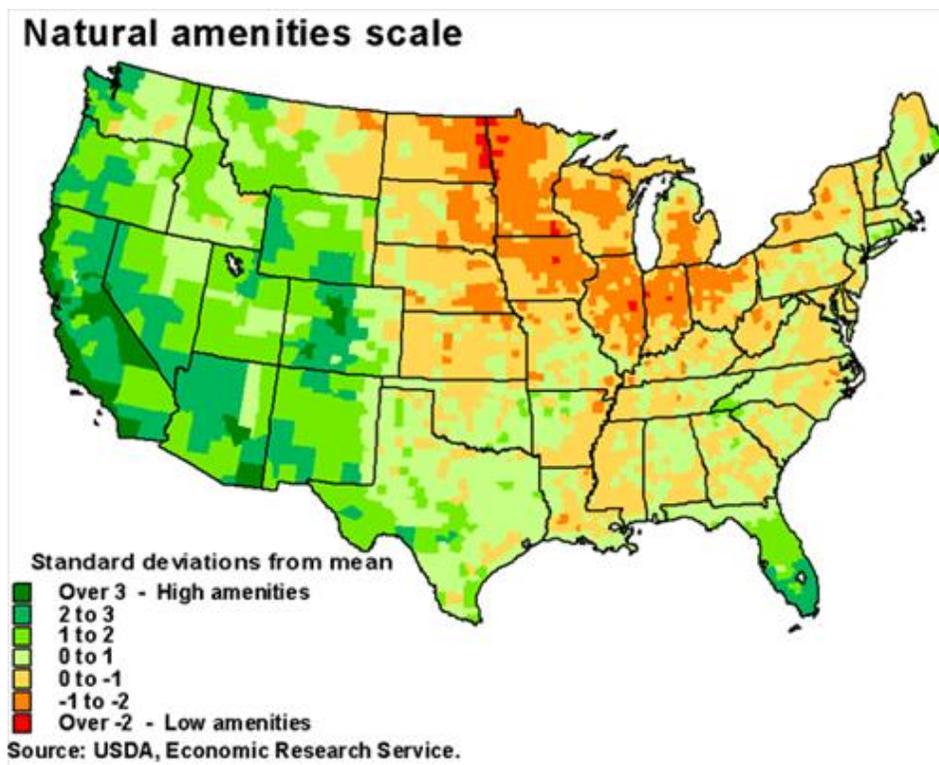


Figure 1.4: David A. McGranahan, Natural Amenities Scale. From the United States Census Bureau, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/natural-amenities-scale/>.

Recreational amenities, which may be rooted in an area’s natural or cultural amenities, are also a factor in modern migration decision making. Jessica D. Ulrich-Schad, sociologist at South Dakota State University, discusses county-level recreation characteristics and population changes in her paper, “Recreational Amenities, Rural Migration Patterns, and the Great Recession.” She claims that “counties with desirable recreational amenities experienced net in-migration from 2000 to 2010 regardless of other county-level attributes.”⁴⁵ In making this claim, Ulrich-Schad uses the Recreational Amenity Classification developed by Kenneth Johnson and Calvin

⁴⁵ Jessica D. Ulrich-Schad, “Recreational Amenities, Rural Migration Patterns, and the Great Recession,” *Population and Environment*. vol. 37 (2015): 157.

Beale for the ERS in 1998. This recreational amenity metric operates similarly to McGranahan's natural amenity scale but emphasizes the importance of the recreational opportunities provided by the natural and human environment in a given county.⁴⁶ This information is useful for planners and policy makers because it reinforces the idea that counties with fewer natural amenities can still attract residents and visitors through recreation.⁴⁷

It is important to also consider the impact of "dis-amenities" in the Mountain West. In their paper, "Rural Gentrification and Nature in the Old and New Wests," Jeremy Bryson and William Wyckoff compare Anaconda and Hamilton, Montana, two communities with a shared geography and history of extractive industries. While Hamilton, situated in the scenic Bitterroot Mountains, has successfully established itself as a "New West" hub, Anaconda, located just a few miles away, continues to struggle. Bryson and Wyckoff attribute this disparity to dis-amenities.⁴⁸ As opposed to Hamilton, a town that got its start in forestry, Anaconda has historically been a major center for a mineral extraction. The scars left by the mining industry, physical and otherwise, diminish the positive influence of local natural amenities in drawing tourists, new residents, and business investment.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Calvin L. Beale and Kenneth M. Johnson, "The Identification of Recreational Counties in Nonmetropolitan Areas of the USA," *Population Research and Policy Review* 17, no. 1 (1998): 37–53.

⁴⁷ Jessica D. Ulrich-Schad, "Recreational Amenities, Rural Migration Patterns, and the Great Recession," *Population and Environment*. vol. 37 (2015): 175.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Bryson and William Wyckoff, "Rural Gentrification and Nature in the Old and New Wests" *Journal of Cultural Geography* 27, no 1 (2010): 55.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

Towards a New West

The popular *Atlas of the New West*, a project developed by the Center for the American West at the University of Colorado in 1997, is a simultaneously light-hearted and serious interpretation of the demographic changes taking place in the Mountain West. William E. Riebsame, the general editor, identified a geographic region that he calls the “New West.” This area is bound by the Sierra Nevada Mountains to the west and the transition zone between the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains to the east.⁵⁰ Using this framework, he visualizes the influx of ex-urban amenity migrants to this historically rural region. To satirically highlight the consumer values of the New West, Riebsame maps the correlation between entities such as breweries, Patagonia stores, vacation homes, and access to *The New York Times*.⁵¹

Ultimately, three defining characteristics emerge from the *Atlas of the New West* that separate the New West from the traditional regional economy. First, New West communities are experiencing rapid population growth, particularly among retirees and young, white-collar professionals. Second, the conservation and preservation priorities of the New West cohort are rooted in fostering leisure activities and experiences. Third, the broad “New West Archipelago,” the chain of urban centers and destination communities tracing the spine of the Rocky Mountains,

⁵⁰ William R. Travis, et al., *Atlas of the New West: Portrait of a Changing Region*, ed. William Riebsame, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 50.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 112-130.

exhibits a profound economic shift from extractive industries to service-based industries.

Since the 1990's, scholars have increasingly adopted the terminology of the New West in discussing socioeconomic changes occurring in the Rocky Mountain states. In their paper, "Social Landscapes of the Inter-Mountain West: A Comparison of Old West and New West Communities," Richelle Winkler, et al. measure the New West-ness of Mountain West communities and analyze the distribution of Old West and New West. The authors suggest that new forms of development have evolved to "sustain the link between communities and their resources."⁵² So far, this development has not occurred uniformly across Mountain West counties. Instead of looking solely at natural amenities and population growth, Winkler et al. use community-specific demographic characteristics to create a scale of New West-ness for Census places in the Mountain West.

The authors ranked each locale in their study area based on their classifications of Classic Old West, Old West, New West, and Model New West. They argue that New West-ness is differentiated primarily by socioeconomic characteristics, thus the factors used to create this scale included (1) the number in-migrants who relocated from out-of-state between 1995 and 2000; (2) the number of in-migrants from metropolitan areas; (3) the percent of the population employed in finance, insurance, or real estate; (4) the percent of the population employed in extractive industries; (5) the percent of housing used for seasonal or occasional use in a given area; (6) the

⁵² Richelle Winkler et al. "Social Landscapes of the Inter-Mountain West: A Comparison of 'Old West' and 'New West' Communities." *Rural Sociology* 72, no. 3 (2007): 478.

percent of housing units exceeding \$200,000 in value; (7) the percent of the population with a 4-year college education; and (8) the percent of the population employed in a tourism-related industry.⁵³ To ensure that smaller communities would register in their analysis, the authors chose not to include the region's largest metropolitan centers: cities such as Denver, Boise, and Salt Lake City.⁵⁴

Winkler et al. found that New West communities cluster together. The authors explain that this phenomenon is driven by the physical landscape, pre-existing tourism-oriented infrastructure, and proximity to metropolitan areas. When compared to high-amenity counties identified by McGranahan (Figure 1.6), New West communities are highly-correlated with amenity-rich counties, whereas Old West communities are correlated with fewer natural amenities.⁵⁵

There is a clear geographic distinction between the communities that exhibit Old and New West characteristics. Evelyn D. Ravuri, a geographer at Saginaw Valley State University, argues that the divide between Old West and New West is geographically delineated by the Rocky Mountains, being that counties lying east of Great Divide are experiencing slower population growth than those adjacent to the mountains.⁵⁶ Ravuri looks specifically at population change and net migration in Wyoming and Montana, chosen for their predominately rural character, to illustrate this disparity. She found that most of the net population growth occurring in these states was concentrated in mountain counties as opposed to plains counties.

⁵³ Ibid., 485-487.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 485.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 497-499.

⁵⁶ Evelyn D. Ravuri, "Straddling the Great Divide: Migration and Population Change in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains," *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy* 3, no. 3 (2008): 1-4.

Furthermore, the largest growth was found to be occurring in urbanized areas along the eastern front of the Rocky Mountains.⁵⁷

As demonstrated by the previous scholars, New Westerners aren't quite ready to give up their urban ties, completely. Douglas E. Booth, retired associate professor of economics, discusses the distribution of population growth in the West, in a broad sense. Unlike Calvin Beale, who posits that the post-1970 rural turnaround was a completely new demographic shift, Booth argues that in-migration to non-metropolitan areas in the Mountain West is a continuation of the suburbanization trend that marked the second half of the 20th century.⁵⁸ Booth holds that Western population growth is centralized around regional urban centers. In describing the combined importance of metropolitan amenities and natural amenities, he states that:

Residents of the Mountain West desire to live near the beauties and amenities of the mountain landscape but do not want to entirely sever their urban ties. Because amenities are the primary attraction of mountain counties rather than employment in locationally dependent industries, at least some migrants must have relatively footloose forms of income.⁵⁹

Just as middle-class professionals and their families chose to move from the city to the suburb for improved quality of life, improved technology allows residents and businesses to consider rural areas. The important take-away from Booth's article is that Mountain West in-migrants simultaneously want the comforts of the city and the beauty and sense of freedom of countryside.⁶⁰ His paper also suggests that more distant counties with a full range of services along major interstates and highways

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

⁵⁸ Douglas E. Booth, "Spatial Patterns in the Economic Development of the Mountain West," *Growth and Change* 30 (Summer 1999): p. 385-386.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 384.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 400.

have potential for growth, especially in attracting retirees or young professionals that can work remotely.⁶¹

Cultural Schisms and Connections

The aspect of the Old West to New West shift that is of most interest to this thesis is the divergent priorities of the two models. Although White Sulphur Springs is undoubtedly a “Classic Old West” community, as defined by Winkler et al., it is not immune to the development or conservation pressures imposed by its “Model New West” neighbors. The emergence of a class and cultural divide between the region’s long-time residents and newcomers is discussed at-length by J. Dwight Hines, an anthropologist at Point Park University. Hines’ experience growing up as a fourth-generation Wyoming sheep rancher and his comprehensive ethnographic studies in Montana’s New West communities give his research a uniquely firsthand perspective into the changes taking place.⁶² Throughout his work, Hines assesses the impact of the in-migration of relatively young ex-urban members of the post-industrial middle class to the predominately rural Mountain West. These individuals bring with them competing values regarding the highest and best use of the region’s natural and cultural resources.

Hines’ stance is that the post-industrial middle class’ emphasis on the production and consumption of experiences is opposed to the traditional mode of

⁶¹ Ibid., 400.

⁶² “J. Dwight Hines,” Point Park University, <https://www.pointpark.edu/Academics/Schools/SchoolofArtsandSciences/Departments/HumanitiesandSocialSciences/HumanitiesFacultyandStaff/JDwightHines>

production and consumption of natural resource-related products.⁶³ He argues that the “gentrification” of the Western landscape has less to do with the displacement of long-time residents as it does with one middle-class world view displacing another.⁶⁴ Hines states that “the gentrification process must be viewed as both a form of class-based colonization of predominately working-class environs by middle-class Americans and the inspiration for intraclass conflict of the middle class.”⁶⁵ To highlight this, he provides the example of the Georgetown Lake controversy, which demonstrates similarities to the current debate over natural resources in Meagher County.

The Montana Power Company created Georgetown Lake in 1901.⁶⁶ The lake served a dual purpose of electrifying neighboring mines and providing water for local sheep and cattle ranchers.⁶⁷ Mining activity in the region has decreased substantially over the past century, but Granite County ranchers are still dependent on the reservoir for irrigation. Housing developments were erected in the area as early as the 1930’s, and the land’s two occupant groups peacefully coexisted around their shared lake for nearly seventy years.

In the more recent past, a local homeowners association for the Georgetown Lake Subdivision was chartered to “ensure use of the Property for attractive recreational and residential purposes only; to promote health and happiness; to prevent unnecessary impairment of the environment; to maintain the tone of the Property in its

⁶³ J. Dwight Hines, “Rural gentrification as permanent tourism: the creation of the ‘New’ West Archipelago as postindustrial cultural space,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*. 28 (2010): 509-525.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 514.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 517.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 517.

native form and preserve its natural beauty as far as possible.”⁶⁸ The language of the association’s policies decouples the landscape, both natural and manmade, from its productive history and elevates its recreational and aesthetic qualities.

In the summer of 2000, conflict between Granite County ranchers and homeowners reached a boiling point. In the midst of a severe draught, the Granite County Commission opted to reduce the release of Georgetown Lake. This decision was reached in the favor of residents and businesses associated with the subdivision who were concerned that low water levels would not only be harmful to its trout and salmon populations, but would diminish the lake’s attractive appearance. Ranchers suffered most, and some viewed this as a taking of their water rights.⁶⁹

In a similar vein, the New World Mine brought tension to Park County, Montana during the 1980’s and 1990’s. Crown Butte Mining, Inc. filed for a hard-rock mining permit in 1990 and immediately attracted opposition from residents of nearby Cooke City and statewide environmental groups. Interested parties were concerned that not only could the mitigation procedures of the mine could contaminate the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, but also that “increased highway traffic of people working at the mine as well as the around-the-clock noise of the operation itself would compromise the experience of this ‘pristine’ place.”⁷⁰ The apprehension was deeply rooted in the residents and visitors’ ability to experience the landscape in its imagined unspoiled state.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 518.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 518-519.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 521.

This literature establishes the stark dichotomy between Old West and New West values: the landscape for the production of physical products versus the landscape for the production of experiences. The accepted stance is that the industrial middle class and the post-industrial middle class are at odds with each other in this contested geographical space. This argument discounts the possibility of the two groups working together for the benefit of their shared environment. How should the post-industrial reality be treated without disrupting industrial potential?

Hines addresses this by diving into community specific details in his article, “The Post-Industrial Regime of Production/Consumption and the New West Archipelago.” Hines looks specifically at Livingston, Montana, a high-amenity town in the southwest region of the state. Livingston is considered to be part of the Greater Yellowstone Environment because of its close proximity to the National Park and other natural amenities.⁷¹ It is here that Hines stresses the post-industrialization of the small-town experience. Hines offers the example of the redevelopment of the Livingston Railroad Depot, an Italianate-style train station that was once a critical link in the Northern Pacific Railroad network. Hines states that:

Today the depot is an important local site of the production/consumption of experience for residents and tourists alike. The experience produced in the Livingston depot falls into three principal categories: first, historical, playing on the major themes of local experience that natives and newcomers alike refer to as integral to the character of the town, county, and area; second, educational, focused on providing extracurricular activities for local youth; and third, local, community-focused programs.⁷²

⁷¹ J. Dwight Hines, “The Post-Industrial Regime of Production/Consumption and the Rural Gentrification of the New West Archipelago,” *Antipode* 44, no. 1 (2011): p. 74-97.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 87.

There are several economic activities in White Sulphur Springs that foster similar post-industrial experiences while valuing the community's industrial heritage, past and present. 2 Basset Brewery, a family-owned company operating out of an adapted auto-parts store on Main Street, has developed a business model that is attractive to longtime residents, newcomers, and visitors, alike. They are plugged into the extensive network of the Montana Brewers Association, a powerful mechanism for regional tourism. At the same time, 2 Bassett Brewery is distinctly local, in terms of its branding, its regular clientele, and its involvement in community activities. Furthermore, the brewery makes use of grains produced by local farmers, thus bolstering the productivity of the surrounding agricultural landscape.

Red Ants Pants demonstrates another successful connection between the productive rural landscape and the creation of post-industrial experiences. The Red Ants Pants Music Festival is a cultural and social event that builds upon the community's resources and rural sense of place. Visitors come from hundreds of miles away to listen to a wide range of country music artists. The fact that the music festival strives to bring in smaller acts with a regional flair, particularly from Montana and Southern Alberta, adds to its sense of credibility and authenticity. This is, or at least gives the impression of, a small but vibrant festival in a small Montana town. In this instance, White Sulphur Springs' rural landscape is being utilized for its cultural meanings to produce an experience that is of value to post-industrial visitors, as well as the locals who are involved in the event's orchestration. The land upon which the festival is situated is provided by local ranchers. The act of producing is even a component of the experience, as the festival offers workshops in traditional

agricultural and timber skills. In the true productive sense, the money raised by the festival is channeled into the Red Ants Pant Foundation, where it is then dispersed to rural communities and working farms.

Historic preservation is a small, but important, piece of this larger narrative. Just as the landscape has been disassociated from its productive qualities by its new occupants, so has the historic built environment. Kent State assistant professor of geography Chris W. Post addresses historic preservation, development, and community collaboration. Post looks at production landscapes being transformed into amenity landscapes. Rather than considering them for their natural qualities, he considers their increasing identity as “relic cultural landscapes.”⁷³ He asks the imperative question, “how do those historic landscapes of long-time ranchers’ heritage fit into the narrative of place in today’s quickly developing valleys?”⁷⁴ Specifically, Post assesses the interpretation of historic rural cemeteries and one-room schoolhouses in Fremont County, Colorado. He argues that long-time residents and amenity-migrants to the area value these historic resources for different reasons, but have found collaborative means to preserve them.⁷⁵

The Garden Park School, constructed in 1893 and closed in 1961, was an important site for older ranchers in the Fremont Valley. These longtime residents remembered the schoolhouse for its role in providing primary education and a convenient place to socialize during their youth.⁷⁶ Conversely, newcomers to area

⁷³ Chris W. Post, “Heritage, amenity, and the changing landscape of the rural American West,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 30, no. 3 (2013): 328.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 329-330.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 344-345.

appreciated the vacant school house as a romantic “residual symbol of isolation” that differentiated Fremont County from the suburbanized world that was familiar to them.⁷⁷ County residents, new and old, formed the Friends of the Garden Park School to preserve the structure as a historic anchor point in the valley and to develop a plan to reuse the structure as a community center.⁷⁸

White Sulphur Spring’s historic main street might mean different things to different people. In an interview, Red Ants Pants founder Sarah Calhoun discussed the intrinsic value of a historic brick commercial building on Main Street (Figures 1.7 and 1.8):

Right now, the old Parberry Building is for sale for \$40,000 and it’s got eight residential units upstairs and two different commercial downstairs, and it’s gorgeous. It’s the other brick historic building—it’s got a Levi’s sign on the side and ‘Western Wear’ out front. It needs a lot of work to bring it up to speed. But, that’s the kind of building that we cannot afford to lose.⁷⁹

While Calhoun readily sees the development potential of this historic resource, longtime residents who were interviewed emphasized Main Street’s lack of productivity their responses. For many, local historic structures such as the Parberry Building are constant reminders of the town’s struggling economy. The solution then lies in filling these buildings with business and services that cater to the needs of the community. The following chapter will identify this community, White Sulphur Springs, and begin to identify aspects of its location and history that may serve as fodder for stimulating heritage-based economic development.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 336.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 345-347.

⁷⁹ Sarah Calhoun (founder of Red Ants Pants) in discussion with the author, December 2017.



Figure 1.5: A December 2017 view of a ghosted Levi's sign on the side of the Parberry Building, located at 20 East Main Street in downtown White Sulphur Springs. From the Author.



Figure 1.6: A December 2017 street view of the signage on the Parberry Building. From the author.

CHAPTER 2

WHITE SULPHUR SPRINGS, MONTANA

“Downtown is divided again, between the blocks of brick emporiums of the 1880’s and a straggle of modern stores which look as if they have been squeezed from a tube labeled Instant Shopping Center.”

— Ivan Doig, Author and White Sulphur Springs Native
Winter Brothers: A Season at the Edge of America



Figure 2.1: A 2017 view of downtown White Sulphur Springs, looking northeast on Main Street. From the author.

The previous chapter examined the demographic and economic characteristics of the Mountain West states at the macro-level. Specifically, the previous chapter elaborated on the spatial distribution of and differences between “Old” and “New West” communities across the region. However, of key importance to this investigation are the activities occurring at the micro-level. To achieve this end, the

remainder of this work will concentrate on White Sulphur Springs, Montana (Figure 2.1). The case study community was selected based on its location, size, economy, and colorful history. Although White Sulphur Springs is unique in many ways, its challenges and opportunities are representative of many other small towns in Montana. The slow transition away from extractive industries and the drain of human resources have not been kind to White Sulphur Springs, but there are signs of change on the horizon. The treatment of natural and cultural resources will play an important role in maintaining the community's quality of life and sense of place as future developments unfold.

This chapter will begin by identifying the location and geography of White Sulphur Springs and its surroundings. Next, a brief history of the community will be presented, with special attention paid to past tourism development efforts. The remainder of the chapter will examine the characteristics of present-day White Sulphur Springs. White Sulphur Springs and Meagher County recently updated their growth policy plans, both of which will inform the nature and sequence of economic development efforts in the area. In Montana, growth policy plans serve as the equivalent to comprehensive plans.⁸⁰ These documents will be analyzed and compared. This chapter will conclude with an examination of three recent community projects: the construction of a new public school, installation of historic-period street lamps, and the Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail. In short, this chapter delves into the recent of the city and suggests its future.

⁸⁰ Jim Richard (Chairman of the White Sulphur Springs Planning Commission) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

To provide the appropriate frame of reference for understanding the case study community, the geographical area described in this chapter will include all of Meagher County. Nearly half of the county's residents reside within White Sulphur Springs, yet their livelihoods and social connections are not restricted to its municipal boundaries. Conversely, residents of Meagher County's unincorporated communities depend on White Sulphur Springs for governance, public education, retail services, and health care. The boundaries of Meagher County, at its peak, encompassed more than 16,000 square miles, thus the discussion pertaining to the history of area will stray into neighboring counties.⁸¹ Certain historical settlements that are no longer a part of Meagher County, such as Diamond City, will receive mention because of their importance to the development of White Sulphur Springs, as we know it today. Distinction between the city and county will be indicated when discussing boundary-specific statistical information.

Location and Environment

White Sulphur Springs is approximately 80 driving miles north of Bozeman, 75 miles east of Helena, and 100 miles south of Great Falls (Figure 2.2). These three cities are the closest urban centers with populations exceeding 10,000 residents. The topography in the immediate vicinity of the city is defined by rolling hills and semi-arid grasslands, much of which is used for cattle grazing. Many neighboring private lands are also used for the production of crops such as barley, alfalfa, wheat, and hay

⁸¹ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, Montana: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 6.

(Figure 2.3). Due to its location in the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains, Meagher County experiences hot summers, cold winters, and minimal precipitation.



Figure 2.2: A map of Montana demonstrating the location of White Sulphur Springs. From the Author.



Figure 2.3: A winter 2017 view of grain silos at the edge of White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

White Sulphur Springs' valley environs are emphasized by the mountainous terrain of the county's outskirts. The Castle Mountains (Figure 2.4) are located to the southeast of the city, the Little Belt Mountains to the north, and the Big Belt Mountains to the west. Several rivers and creeks meander through the lowlands, including the Smith River and its tributaries. Meagher County is bound by the Helena National Forest to the east and the Lewis and Clark National Forest to the north, both of which provided ample timber to drive the county's formerly robust logging industry. These natural amenity resources serve as important tourism magnets for the region. Showdown Ski Resort of the Little Belts is a favorite winter destination for Central Montanans. The Smith River is equally popular during the summer months among outdoor recreationalists and trout fishermen.



Figure 2.4: A July 2016 view of the Castle Mountains outside of White Sulphur Springs, MT. From the author.

The city's built environment is oriented around the intersection of US-Routes 12 and 89. Because of its highway access, White Sulphur Springs is not as isolated as some of the smaller communities in Meagher County. Route 12 provides access to the City of Townsend to the west, while Route 89 connects White Sulphur Springs to I-90 to the south and Great Falls to the north. The city's concentrated commercial core exhibits many physical features that are characteristic of small towns in the West, including a gridiron plan, a wide main street, and low profile wood and brick buildings with false fronts. Though many downtown buildings have changed uses or have been replaced over the city's 150-year history, the general form of the streetscape has remained relatively constant.

The median age of the housing stock in White Sulphur Springs is 45 years old and 21.35% of all homes within the city were built before 1939.⁸² This figure is much higher than the state's 12.77%.⁸³ White Sulphur Springs boasts many historic residential and commercial structures. Main Street features a mix of late-19th to mid-20th century buildings. Several bars mentioned in Ivan Doig's memoir, *This House of Sky*, including the Stockmen and the Mint, stand as enduring anchor points (Figure 2.5). Red Ants Pants, one of the businesses to be discussed in Chapter 4, occupies the National Register-listed "Wellman Block," a building that has historically been used as a saddle shop. The city's most extravagant building is a stone, Romanesque-Revival mansion that sits atop hill on the northeast edge of town (Figure 2.6). "The Castle," also listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was constructed in

⁸² SimplyAnalytics (2018), Bureau of the Census 2010, from SimplyAnalytics database.

⁸³ Ibid.

1890 for Byron R. Sherman, a wealthy silver miner and cattle rancher. Today, “The Castle” houses the Meagher County Historical Society.



Figure 2.5: A December 2017 view of the Stockmen Bar, located at 117 East Main Street, White Sulphur Springs. From the author.



Figure 2.6: A 2017 view of the Byron R. Sherman House, also known as "The Castle," From the author.

History



Figure 2.7: Meagher County News, Early view of White Sulphur Springs with the Byron R. Sherman House on the horizon, no date. From *An Early-Day Pictorial History of Meagher County*.

Prior to Anglo-American settlement, the area in question was inhabited by Native American tribes, namely the Flathead, Blackfeet, and the Crow, who would seasonally travel through the area to hunt for buffalo.⁸⁴ Although little has been written about the individuals who lived here, evidence such as footpaths, tools, tepee rings, and buffalo jumps are physical reminders of their presence. A row of stones marking the territorial boundary between the Crow and the Sioux can be found between Hedges and Martinsdale.⁸⁵ The hot springs located in the center of present-day White Sulphur Springs was a frequent pilgrimage site for tribes that used its

⁸⁴ Marylyn McMillan, “‘El Dorado of Ease:’ Taking the Waters at White Sulphur Springs,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 35, no. 2 (1985): 38.

⁸⁵ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, Montana: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 8.

waters for medicinal purposes.⁸⁶ Despite the disputes between the Native Americans of Montana's Great Plains, the Smith River Valley was considered an area of peace.

Meagher County, established in 1867, was named for General Thomas Francis Meagher (Figure 2.8), a “dashing and romantic soldier of fortune who called Montana home for only a short time.”⁸⁷ Meagher was born in Waterford, Ireland in 1823.

During the French Revolution, he was sent to France by leaders of the Irish Confederation to congratulate the rebels. Upon his return to England, he was charged with high treason and was banished to Tasmania. He managed to escape the island in 1852, arrived in New York soon after, and began to make a life for himself in America. Having established himself as a military leader during the Civil War, Meagher was appointed as Secretary of the Montana Territory in 1865 and quickly rose to the post of Governor. Meagher had as many enemies as he had friends in Montana's early government. In 1867, he mysteriously fell off of a

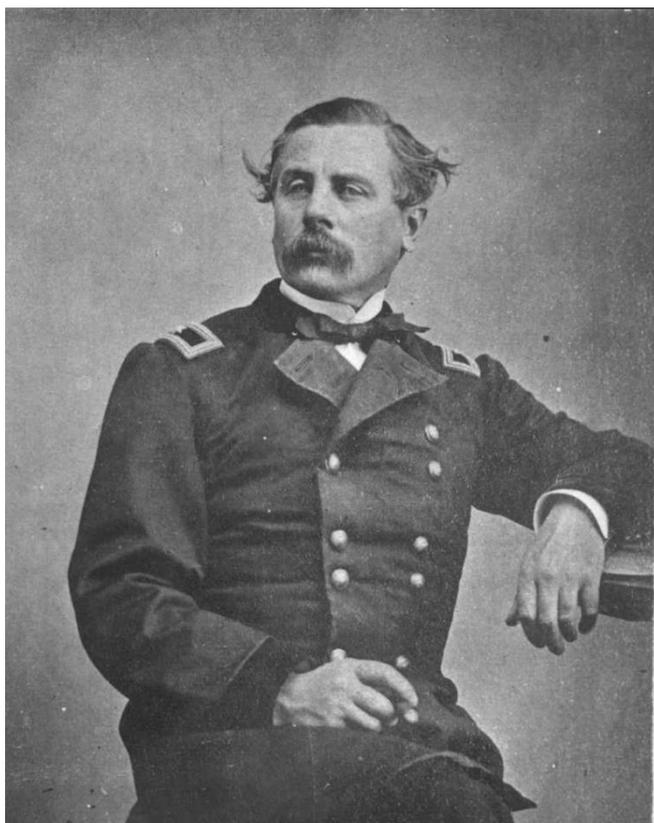


Figure 2.8: Formal portrait of Thomas Francis Meagher in Uniform in 1864. From the Montana State University Library, Thomas Brown Brook Photographs Collection.

⁸⁶ Marylyn McMillan, “‘El Dorado of Ease:’ Taking the Waters at White Sulphur Springs,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 35, no. 2 (1985): 39.

⁸⁷ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, Montana: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 5.

steamboat in Fort Benton. His body was never found and speculation around the circumstances of his death persists, to this day.⁸⁸

Diamond City was the first permanent settlement in Meagher County and served as the county seat until it was replaced by White Sulphur Springs in the 1880's. Stories surrounding the establishment of Diamond City are thick with embellishment and local lore. One version recounts that gold was discovered in the Big Belt Mountains in 1864 by former Confederate soldiers, Pomp Dennis, John Wells, Washington Baker, and Jack Thompson. The men were on the run from an Indian war party, and in their escape they happened upon the to some of the richest pay-dirt in the West.⁸⁹ Local historian Lee Rostad questions the validity of this tale and suggests that the initial discovery was most likely far less adventurous. Its ambiguous origins aside, Diamond City's population exploded over the next two years, peaking in 1867. The total number of occupants is also disputed, but some sources claim that the town reached 10,000 residents in its heyday.⁹⁰ Then, just as quickly as appeared, Diamond City was all but erased from the map. By 1885, only four families remained.⁹¹

The relocation of Diamond City's Union League of American Hall (Figure 2.9), constructed in 1865, inadvertently saved one of the Montana Territory's oldest structures. When White Sulphur Springs became the county seat in 1880, Diamond Lodge No. 5 of the Independent Order of Good Templars employed a team of oxen to

⁸⁸ Ibid., 5.

⁸⁹ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, Montana: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 10.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁹¹ Meagher County Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early Day Pictorial History, 1867-1976*, (White Sulphur Springs: Meagher County News, 1968), 4.

cart the building 30 miles to White Sulphur Springs. The local First Presbyterian Church was its most recent occupant, though it has been used as an auxiliary storage space by the Meagher County Historical Society since the 1970's.⁹² The Union Hall is currently located on the corner of East Crawford Street and South Central Avenue, across from White Sulphur Springs School.



Figure 2.9: Associated Press. Members of the Meagher County Historical Association stand in the former Union League of America Hall in White Sulphur Springs, from the *Helena Independent Record*, 2009.

Whereas many of its contemporary 19th-century settlements were experiencing the harsh boom-and-bust cycle of natural resource extraction, White Sulphur Springs

⁹² Associated Press, “142-year-old building holds gold-rush history,” *Helena Independent Record* (Helena, MT), May 9, 2009, https://helenair.com/news/local/year-old-building-holds-gold-rush-history/article_69323239-e3a1-545a-9bfe-987247b47135.html.

suffered from the boom-and-bust cycle of natural resource tourism during its early history. The individuals who initially settled White Sulphur Springs hoped that it would become a “hotspot,” literally and figuratively, for the West’s wealthy vacationers. James Scott Brewer, a native of Frederick County, Virginia, arrived in the Montana Territory in 1864. Upon discovering the thermal springs, he founded “Brewer Springs” and erected the first building in the Smith River Valley in 1866.⁹³

During the second half of the 19th century, the practice of touring hot springs was common among the elite of the American East. With the intention of recreating the same sense of sophistication, the rough-and-tumble miners and homesteaders of Montana established hot spring resorts in several locations across the Territory. Brewer advertised the health benefits of his mineral-rich springs, and visitors came by the wagon-load to “take the waters.”⁹⁴ The business grew, and Brewer opened a small, log-frame cabin hotel on the site in 1872.⁹⁵

Brewer’s success was short lived. Having funded his venture on borrowed money, he could no longer afford to stay open and pay his creditors. The foreclosed hot springs resort was purchased at auction by Dr. William Parberry in 1877. Born in Bourbon County, Kentucky in 1833, he was a self-made physician who came to the Montana Territory by way of Jefferson City, Missouri. Enthusiastic about the medicinal uses of the spring water and optimistic about future’s tourism potential,

⁹³ Marylyn McMillan, “‘El Dorado of Ease:’ Taking the Waters at White Sulphur Springs,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 35, no. 2 (1985): 39-40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

Parberry invested in expanding the resort. He renamed the feature, “White Sulphur Springs,” after the white sulfuric mineral deposits that collected at the water’s edge.⁹⁶

Parberry had grander aspirations for the hot springs. He wanted a city, however there were others with a vision for the new community. Jonas Higgins, who had maintained a general store in Diamond City, relocated his business to White Sulphur Springs in 1878. He erected his store on the “main travelled road” that connected Fort Logan and Martinsdale.⁹⁷ Parberry noted that his resort would be better suited if the main road through town was oriented west to east. So, he obtained a patent for the land, had it platted, and constructed the new thoroughfare, leaving Higgins’ store awkwardly situated several hundred feet north from the street front. In response, Higgins platted his own townsite with the permission of the Meagher County commissioners, who did not want to take sides with either party. As a result of this feud, Higgins’ brick building awkwardly jutted out into Main Street until it was torn down to make way for state highway construction in the mid-20th century (Figure 2.10).⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁷ Lee Rostad, *Three Ringlings in Montana: Circus Trains to Cattle Ranches* (Helena, MT: Riverbend Publishing, 2015), 36.

⁹⁸ Meagher County Historical Society, *Meagher County: An Early Day Pictorial History, 1867-1976*, (White Sulphur Springs: Meagher County News, 1968), 17.



Figure 2.10: Meagher County News, An 1880's view of Jonas Higgins' store (far left) sticking out into Main Street of White Sulphur Springs. From *An Early Day Pictorial History of Meagher County, Montana*.

After the turn of the century, the hot springs changed hands once again. This time, they were acquired by John Ringling of the Ringling Brothers Circus Company. In addition to his involvement in the family's circus, John Ringling pursued other niche business ventures across the United States. His first interest in Meagher County was land and cattle, and he purchased 20,000 acres there in 1903. Ringling purchased an additional 70,000 acres in the Smith River Valley and formed the Ringling and White, Inc. development company with William L. White from New York.⁹⁹ The company advertised and sold parcels of land to draw farmers and ranchers to the area, though the Homestead Act of 1862 was still the most common means of obtaining land in the west.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Lee Rostad, *Three Ringlings in Montana: Circus Trains to Cattle Ranches* (Helena, MT: Riverbend Publishing, 2015), 42.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

Ringling purchased the hot springs in 1910 and announced that he was going to build a \$200,000 bathhouse on the site. He went as far as to enlist a German chemist to verify the quality of the water, and subsequently proclaimed that springs were finest in the Western hemisphere.¹⁰¹ Ringling planned to attract a financial stimulus for the project, at least \$50,000, from residents of White Sulphur Springs and the valley. With the onset of the Great Depression, funds never materialized, and Ringling did not follow-through on the renovation. Though the resort never amounted to the world-class destination that Brewer, Parberry, and Ringling hoped it would be, the hot springs still provide year-round entertainment for residents and tourists, alike (Figure 2.11).



Figure 2.11: A December 2017 view of the neon sign above the Spa Hot Springs Motel, a visual landmark at the corner of Main Street and 3rd Avenue in downtown White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 45.

When residents recall Ringling's local legacy, his foray into the railroad business also comes to mind. Prior to moving to Montana, Ringling already had a long history of developing obscure rail spurs between small towns and major rail lines.¹⁰² Residents of White Sulphur Springs had been spurned twice before by the all-important mode of transportation. When the Northern Pacific Railroad was being constructed, they hoped that the line would pass through White Sulphur Springs on its way to Helena. Instead, neighboring Townsend was chosen. When the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad, more commonly known as the Milwaukee Road, was being built, it missed White Sulphur Springs by connecting with the Northern Pacific Railroad at Lombard.¹⁰³ Seeing the business opportunity, Ringling agreed to connect White Sulphur Springs to the established rail network.

When incorporated in 1910, the line was dubbed the White Sulphur Springs and Yellowstone Park Railroad (WSS&YPR). Ringling, who was in the throes of promoting the hot springs, hoped that connecting White Sulphur Springs to the edge of Yellowstone National Park would increase the flow of tourists to the small city. However, the immediate goal was to connect White Sulphur Springs with Milwaukee Road at Dorsey. In a wave of excitement, the town of Leader, located near Dorsey, changed its name to Ringling. White Sulphur Springs residents responded by building a new hotel, an Episcopal church, and numerous grand houses.¹⁰⁴

The rail spur never made it to Yellowstone, and it never made it passed Dorsey. Even though the railroad made it easier for the people of White Sulphur

¹⁰² Ibid., 41-42.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 46-47.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 57.

Springs to travel and transport goods to the expansive Milwaukee Road, the operation was riddled with problems from the start. Residents gradually lost confidence in its effectiveness because of its irregular schedules, poor maintenance, and frequent derailments.¹⁰⁵ The railroad experienced a revival during the 1940's at the onset of the lumber boom White Sulphur Springs, but the tracks were still plagued with safety concerns and the company continued to decline.¹⁰⁶ The WSS&YPR was once again "plucked from its deathbed," by a developer named King Wilson in 1975. He purchased a Victorian-era railcar from Virginia and brought it to Meagher County in the hopes of turning the spur into a tourist line. This venture also failed, but it brought White Sulphur Springs to the attention of the producers of *Heartland* (1979), who featured the car and the White Sulphur Springs train station in their film.¹⁰⁷

The late-19th and early-20th bore witness to many unsuccessful attempts at tourism development in White Sulphur Springs, but the community was consistently dependent on ranching, farming, and other resource-related industries. It wasn't until the mid-20th century White Sulphur Springs found itself becoming a logging town. After World War II, Midwestern logging crews began harvesting timber from the Little and Big Belt Mountains. Jerry O'Malley, a native of Oregon, brought the first sawmill to town in the early 1950's. F.A. Vollestedt, also from Oregon, purchased timber rights from Wellington Rankin's 71 Ranch and opened a planer in White Sulphur Spring in 1956. Numerous large mills were constructed by other outsiders, in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 55-57.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 58.

quick succession, by which point White Sulphur Springs' population and economy were booming.¹⁰⁸

The Vollestedt mill was the most enduring of the operations and was active until the mid-1970's when F.A. Vollestedt began experiencing health complications. The family's two mills were acquired by the McFarland Pole Company of Idaho in 1974. In the early 1980's, the structures were destroyed in a fire, forcing McFarland to sell to Brand S. Brand S closed the White Sulphur Springs location and consolidated their timber manufacturing with the company's sawmill in Livingston, thus ending White Sulphur Springs brief, but prosperous, lumber era.¹⁰⁹

These elements of White Sulphur Springs' history are captured most authentically by Ivan Doig, a journalist turned novelist who, during his lifetime, wrote extensively about Montana and its small towns. Doig was born in White Sulphur Springs in 1939 to second-generation Montana ranchers. His memoir, *This House of Sky*, celebrates the places and faces of Meagher County that he knew during his adolescence. Being so small in population, the average citizens of 20th-century White Sulphur Springs and the surrounding county play leading roles in Doig's account of how the community came to be the way it is today. Since Doig's passing in 2015, fans of his literature have flocked to White Sulphur Springs to visit the sites that he frequented. In September of 2017, Montana State University hosted a destination event, *Doig County: Imagining Montana and the West*. In addition to participating in a driving tour between White Sulphur Springs and Ringling, attendees were also given

¹⁰⁸ Lee Rostad, *Mountains of Gold, Hills of Grass: A History of Meagher County* (Martinsdale, Montana: Bozeman Fork Publishing, 1994), 138-139.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

the opportunity to explore local history at the Castle Museum and take part in a complimentary beer tasting at 2 Basset Brewery.¹¹⁰ The Meagher County Chamber of Commerce has also taken steps to incorporate Doig into their promotion of heritage tourism and recently launched an interactive map featuring ranches, bars, and other locations associated with his life.¹¹¹

Present-Day White Sulphur Springs

The population of Montana has grown steadily over the past 50 years. Between 1960 and 2017, the statewide population has increased by 55.7% (Figure 2.12).¹¹² The demographic trajectory has been considerably different for Meagher County and White Sulphur Springs (Figures 2.13 and 2.14). In 2017, Meagher County was estimated to be the tenth least populous county of 56 counties in Montana.¹¹³ With a total population of 1,815 individuals, the approximate density of Meagher County is 1.3 people per square mile. The county's population has decreased, gradually, by 29.2% since 1960.¹¹⁴ White Sulphur Springs' population peaked in 1980, reaching a total of 1,302 residents, and decreased by 26% over the following decade. This sharp population decline was a direct result of the loss of local lumber industry jobs. The estimated population of White Sulphur Springs in 2017 is 925 residents, approximately half of Meagher County's total population.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ "A Field Trip to Doig Country," Montana State University, 2017, <http://ivandoig.montana.edu/symposium-2017/field-trip-registration-doig-symposium-2017.html>.

¹¹¹ "Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail," Meagher County Chamber of Commerce, 2018, <https://meaghercountymt.maps.arcgis.com/apps/View/index.html?appid=655f2b9fc61e4507874f338bdc4d49fc>.

¹¹² United States Census Bureau, Decennial Census and ACS 1-Year Estimates, 1960-2017, using American FactFinder.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ United States Census Bureau, ACS 1-Year Estimates, 2017, using American FactFinder.

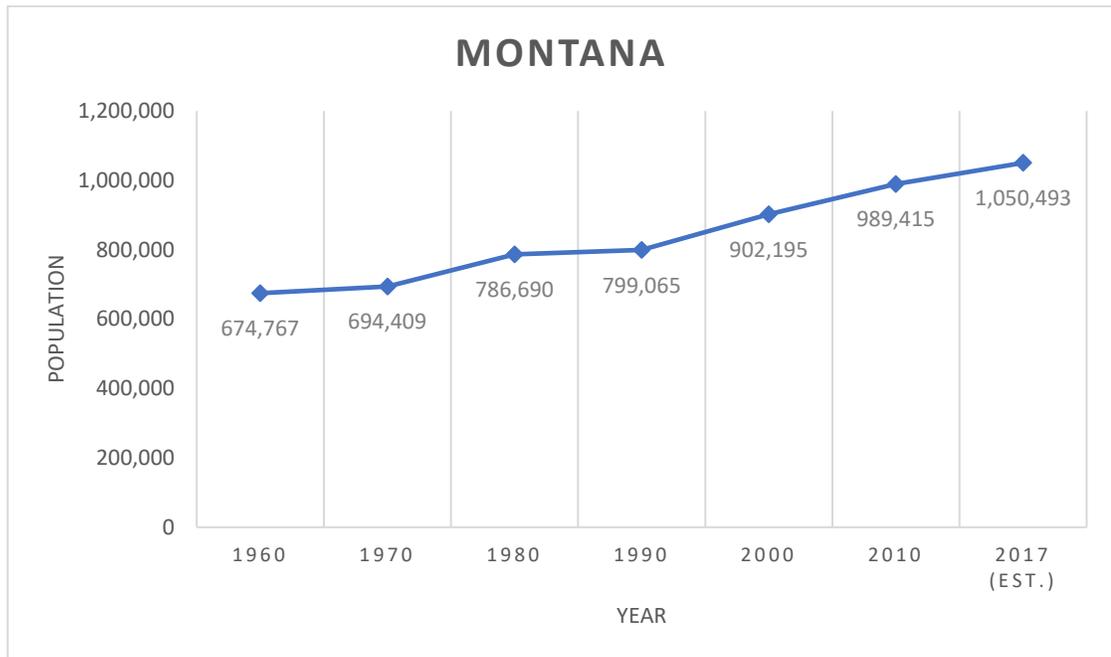


Figure 2.12: Population of Montana. From the United States Census Bureau.

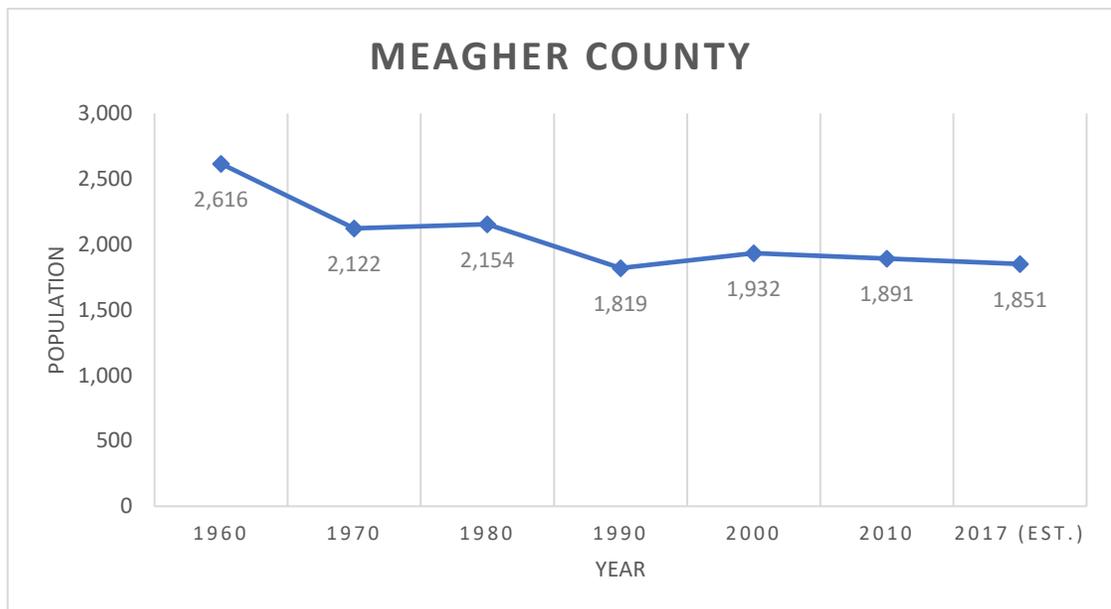


Figure 2.13: Population of Meagher County, Montana. From the United States Census Bureau.

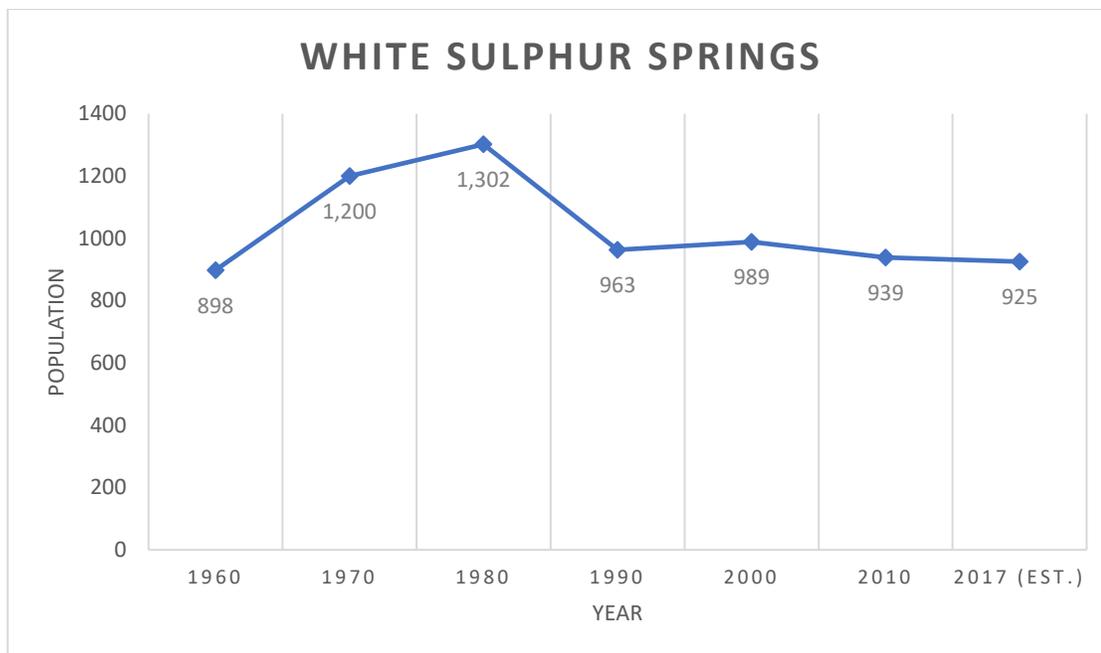


Figure 2.14: Population of White Sulphur Springs, Montana. From the United States Census Bureau.

Recent demographic data also highlights Meagher County and White Sulphur Springs' growing elderly population. According to 2016 American Community Survey estimates, the largest age group in Meagher County is that of residents 65 and older. This is the second largest age group within White Sulphur Springs' city limits (Figures 2.15 and 2.16). Both Meagher County and White Sulphur Springs have large school-age populations, being 5 to 17 years of age. The young adult age group, 18 to 24 years of age, represents the smallest age category for Meagher County and the second smallest for White Sulphur Springs.¹¹⁶ This suggests that many individuals are leaving the area immediately after high school. Over time, the skewed age

¹¹⁶ United States Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016, using American FactFinder.

demographics of the county and city will result in the natural decrease of the local population.

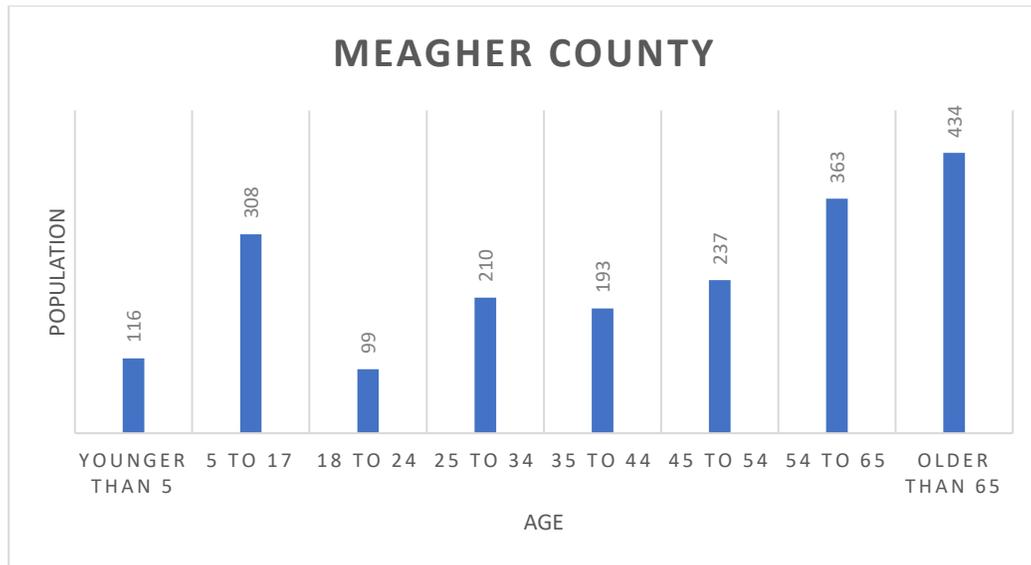


Figure 2.15: Age of Meagher County, Montana Residents. From the United States Census Bureau.

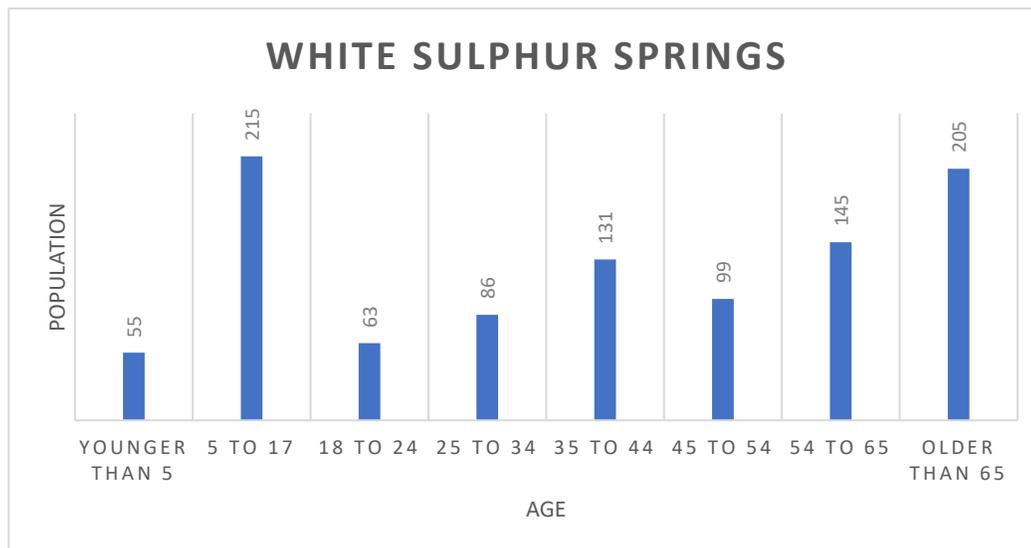


Figure 2.16: Age of White Sulphur Springs, Montana Residents. From the United States Census Bureau.

Agriculture is Meagher County's top industry, employing 24.4% of the workforce.¹¹⁷ In the 2012 Census of Agriculture, Meagher County boasted 136 farms. These establishments shared a combined area of 812,325 acres, approximately 53% of the total land in the county. The average farm size in Meagher County was 5,973 acres while the average farm size in Montana was 2,134 acres. This notable difference in size can be attributed to the amount of total farmland used for pasture, 81.2% in Meagher County and 65.8% statewide. Among the top livestock maintained in the county were cattle, totaling 41,930, hogs, and sheep. The total number of other livestock types were withheld from the Census so as to avoid disclosing data that would reveal individual operations. For each of the livestock categories, Meagher County production ranks in the top half of all Montana counties. The top crop items recorded for the county were forage land for hay (34,599 acres), barley (8,614 acres), and wheat of various types and seasons (6,722 acres).¹¹⁸

In contrast, the most represented industries in White Sulphur Springs include healthcare and retail trade, employing 21.1% and 17.7% of the workforce, respectively.¹¹⁹ Mountainview Medical Center, the local hospital, and the White Sulphur Springs School District are the top individual employers.¹²⁰ This is consistent with the age distribution of White Sulphur Springs' residents, which indicates that the city has large school-age and elderly populations. Recreation and hospitality is the

¹¹⁷ United States Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, using American FactFinder.

¹¹⁸ United States Department of Agriculture, "Meagher County," Census of Agriculture, 2012.

¹¹⁹ United States Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, using American FactFinder.

¹²⁰ White Sulphur Springs, Montana. County Commissioners Office. White Sulphur Springs Growth Policy Plan. By White Sulphur Springs City Council, White Sulphur Springs Planning Board, White Sulphur Springs City Administration Staff, Meagher County, and CTA Architects Engineers. May 1, 2017, 24.

third largest industry in White Sulphur Springs, accounting for 16.8% of workforce.¹²¹ Between 2004 and 2014, recreation employment more than doubled, underscoring the growing importance of tourism as a driver of the city's economy..¹²²

Overall, White Sulphur Springs and Meagher County's economies are stronger than they have been in over thirty years, but there is still room to grow. In 2005, the *Economist* identified Meagher County as the poorest county in the America, according to the county's median income, \$13,485 at the time, and annual tax revenues.¹²³ In fact, nearly all twenty of the counties noted in the article, "The Poorest Part of America," were located in the Eastern Rocky Mountains or the Western Great Plains. Seven of the top counties were located in Central and Eastern Montana. Meagher County is no longer the poorest county in the nation, let alone Montana, but its median income, \$39,032, lags substantially behind the statewide median of \$48,380.

¹²¹ United States Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2016, using American FactFinder.

¹²² White Sulphur Springs, Montana. County Commissioners Office. *White Sulphur Springs Growth Policy Plan*. By White Sulphur Springs City Council, White Sulphur Springs Planning Board, White Sulphur Springs City Administration Staff, Meagher County, and CTA Architects Engineers. May 1, 2017, 24.

¹²³ Anonymous, "The poorest part of America: Not here, surely?" *The Economist*, December 8, 2005, <https://www.economist.com/united-states/2005/12/08/not-here-surely>.



Figure 2.17: A December 2017 view of the Meagher County Courthouse in downtown White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

Plans for a Prosperous Future

The Meagher County Growth Policy Plan was adopted in 2015. It highlights Meagher County's many assets, including the abundant outdoor recreation opportunities, successful cattle ranches, rich mineral resources, and sites of historical interest.¹²⁴ The plan also points to some of the challenges facing Meagher County, including population decline, a disproportionate elderly population, declining enrollment in schools, and deteriorated infrastructure and housing stock.¹²⁵ The plan suggests that the two most viable avenues for county-wide economic growth include

¹²⁴ Meagher County, Montana. County Commissioners Office, *Meagher County Growth Policy Plan*, by Great West Engineering and the Montana Business Assistance Connection, White Sulphur Springs, MT: Meagher County, October 2015, 4.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

tourism development and Sandfire Resource's proposed Black Butte Copper Project.¹²⁶

The Montana Business Assistance Connection and the Meagher County Commissioners first met in October of 2013 to discuss updating the county's 2003 growth policy. Data for the report was collected between January and June of 2014, culminating in a draft submitted to county officials. The 2014 draft was prepared by the Montana Business Assistance Connection, Chris Shove, and Sarah Roshak.¹²⁷ The final draft of the plan, prepared by the Montana Business Assistance Connection and Great West Engineering, was adopted in December of 2015. Policy recommendations were made based on stakeholder survey responses and community meetings conducted in the spring of 2014. Specific survey results and community meeting notes are included in the Appendix of the 2014 draft, but were omitted from the final report.

The plan begins with an executive summary and synopsis of the process by which the report was developed. The emphasis on the importance of the county's natural resources, for both recreational and extractive purposes, is present from the first page. The body of the plan provides an overview of those natural resources, population demographics, housing stock, local economy, and infrastructure. The writers describe the county's current land use policies, or lack thereof, and detail what changes will need to be made to respond to the copper mine development, if it

¹²⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁷ Meagher County, Montana. County Commissioners Office, Meagher County Growth Policy Plan 2014, by Montana Business Assistance Connection, Chris Shove, and Sarah Roshak, White Sulphur Springs, MT: Meagher County, 2014. 1-49.

receives approval. The final section describes the proposed growth policies, with or without the mine, in detail.

The plan asserts that mining will become one of the county's top industries in the near future. Meagher County and the surrounding region has a history of mining for lead, copper, zinc, and gold. Several local stakeholders have expressed their concerns about mining operations polluting the Smith River and its tributaries; however, the majority sentiment among community members is in support of the mine. The construction phase of the mine project could bring nearly 300 jobs to county, and the long-term operation of the mine could require more than 250 full-time employees.¹²⁸

Meagher County has experienced steady outmigration over the past half-century, with the most significant loss occurring after the closure of the local lumber mills. In 2010, the median age in Meagher County was 50 years old. Between 2000 and 2010, the young and working age cohort dropped dramatically as a result of an aging population and a decrease in the number of women of childbearing age. The county hopes that the proposed copper mine will attract new residents and families to the area, particularly White Sulphur Springs.¹²⁹

The plan also addresses concerns regarding the built environment, including poor-quality housing and high vacancy rates. A reconnaissance level survey conducted in 2014 indicated that the majority of the county's residential buildings

¹²⁸ Meagher County, Montana. County Commissioners Office, Meagher County Growth Policy Plan 2014, by Great West Engineering and the Montana Business Assistance Connection, White Sulphur Springs, MT: Meagher County, October 2015, 21.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 19-20.

needed refurbishment.¹³⁰ The county suggests that an influx of new residents working at the copper mine will fill vacant housing in White Sulphur Springs and lead to renovations and new construction developments. Nationally recognized land use zoning codes and construction standards will be implemented at the county-level to ensure sturdy construction and prevent sprawl.¹³¹

The plan references the county's long history of tourism, giving mention to past efforts in developing the hot springs and other local attractions. The plan identifies the county's premier outdoor recreation amenities as the Smith River and nearby mountain ranges. The tourism events discussed include the PRCA Labor Day Rodeo and the Red Ants Pants Music Festival, both of which celebrate the county's agricultural traditions and rural sense of place.¹³² The county intends to continue marketing these attractions to foster continued growth of the regional tourism economy. They also express interest in the statewide Montana Main Street program, which would facilitate the rehabilitation of commercial spaces in downtown White Sulphur Springs.¹³³

Community surveys and stakeholder meetings resulted in the following growth policy objectives: "improve the county's economy, implement land use regulations, pursue sustainable growth with or without the approval of the copper mine, make improvements to downtown White Sulphur Springs, and concentrate new development

¹³⁰ Ibid., 5.

¹³¹ Ibid., 5.

¹³² Meagher County, Montana. County Commissioners Office, Meagher County Growth Policy Plan 2014, by Montana Business Assistance Connection, Chris Shove, and Sarah Roshak, White Sulphur Springs, MT: Meagher County, 2014, 17.

¹³³ Ibid., 36.

to minimize infrastructure costs and taxes.”¹³⁴ Regardless of the mine project, the county intends to stop the expansion of infrastructure and repair that which already exists, apply for assistance from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Main Street program, and use eminent domain to clear buildings and structures that pose a public health hazard. In relation to the mining-related growth, the county would like instate construction codes that will promote quality building standards, encourage cluster development within White Sulphur Springs, and apply for an infrastructure grant from the United States Economic Development Administration.¹³⁵

In an interview in December 2017, the three County Commissioners, Ben Hurwitz, Herb Townsend, and Rod Brewer were keen to share their personal thoughts on the county’s needs. All have been cattle ranchers in Meagher County for most of their lives, but Herb Townsend joked about being a transplant because he has only lived in the area for the past fifty years.¹³⁶ They affirmed that the creation of jobs, in diverse industries, and investment in improved housing and infrastructure were the key priorities of their constituents. Collectively, they were skeptical of the revenue potential of the county’s recreational amenities and tourist attractions, especially those that are seasonally dependent.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Ibid., ii.

¹³⁵ Meagher County, Montana. County Commissioners Office, Meagher County Growth Policy Plan 2014, by Great West Engineering and the Montana Business Assistance Connection, White Sulphur Springs, MT: Meagher County, October 2015, 8-12.

¹³⁶ Herb Townsend (Meagher County Commissioner) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

¹³⁷ Ben Hurwitz, Herb Townsend, and Rod Brewer (Meagher County Commissioners) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

The Meagher County Growth Policy Plan served as the guiding document for the White Sulphur Springs Growth Policy Plan, released in May of 2017. The city's plan represents the most up-to-date strategic plan for the small Central Montana community. The plan, which was developed over a nine-month period between May 2016 and January 2017, draws heavily on the Meagher County plan in presenting the city and county's shared vision. The White Sulphur Springs plan is intended to be the guiding document for establishing where and how the city will grow. It provides a foundation for governmental regulations, such as land use and zoning, and highlights the balance between long-term community needs and the needs of individuals and businesses.

Similar to the Meagher County's Growth Policy Plan, the White Sulphur Springs' growth policy was assembled using information gathered from community surveys and public meetings. Some of the key discussion points raised by residents included:

- Concern that the town's declining tax base has made it increasingly difficult for the local government to maintain quality public facilities and services
- Desire for an effective economic development program
- General support among residents for the proposed Tintina copper mine
- Poor condition of infrastructure, including unpaved streets and outdated water and sewer lines
- The significant deterioration of White Sulphur Springs' housing stock
- Lack of public transportation for elderly, disabled, and low-income residents¹³⁸

The plan addresses these issues, in full, by providing a list of policy goals tied to economic development, public facilities and services, housing, and public

¹³⁸ White Sulphur Springs, Montana. County Commissioners Office. *White Sulphur Springs Growth Policy Plan*. By White Sulphur Springs City Council, White Sulphur Springs Planning Board, White Sulphur Springs City Administration Staff, Meagher County, and CTA Architects Engineers. May 1, 2017, 10.

communication and information. After an in-depth of overview of current community demographic and financial characteristics, the author's outline the city's implementation plan, featuring specific high-priority projects.

The plan begins by asserting that the city is in a period of change. For most of its existence White Sulphur Springs has relied on timber and agriculture to support its economy. In recent years, city has witnessed a marked increase in tourism and small business development.¹³⁹ The authors hypothesize that this trend is likely to continue and that the city must adapt to accommodate these changes. The authors explain that White Sulphur Springs faces many of the same challenges that other rural western communities face, such as an aging population, aging infrastructure, and limited financial resources.¹⁴⁰ These challenges can be met with focused efforts and community support. Several positive changes have been made since the finalization of the Meagher County Growth Policy Plan. The local public school was rebuilt, the lighting along Main Street was replaced with historic-inspired lamp posts, several new and existing small businesses have renovated their storefronts and updated their signage, and street paving and sidewalk improvement within city limits is ongoing.

The community overview section of the plan contains much of same statistical information included in the Meagher County plan. The authors indicate that, although agriculture is a still a dominate economic force in area, increased efficiency in farm and ranch technology has contributed to the shrinking number of individuals in the local agricultural labor force. Established farm and ranch families can manage their

¹³⁹ Ibid., 17.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

crops and cattle with fewer workers.¹⁴¹ On the flip-side, White Sulphur Springs has experienced a 55% increase in total number of jobs over the past ten years. Most of these positions are in the retail and service sector.¹⁴² The city's largest employers include Mountainview Medical Center, the school district, Bank of the Rockies, and the Spa Hot Springs Hotel. Unemployment hit a low point in 2013 at 2.3% but sits at 4% in 2017.¹⁴³

There are an estimated 700 structures within White Sulphur Springs city limits. 62% of the building stock is comprised of single-family dwellings, 25% storage sheds and outbuildings, 9% commercial and retail buildings, 2% institutional buildings, and 1% multi-family dwellings.¹⁴⁴ While there have been concerted efforts to improve the appearance of storefronts on Main Street, many buildings, commercial and residential, still need repair. As was the case in the Meagher County plan, the preparators of the White Sulphur Springs plan voice interest in applying for inclusion in the Montana Main Street Program, but no action has been taken thus far.¹⁴⁵

The plan offers a vision for White Sulphur Springs over the next ten to twenty years. It states that the community hopes to maintain the city's small-town feel, amplify its historic character, encourage compact land use development, and facilitate updated, safe infrastructure.¹⁴⁶ The city's implementation plan, included in the second half of the report, categorizes project opportunities into seven fields: Community,

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 21.

¹⁴² Ibid., 23.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 23.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

Parks, Housing, Downtown Development, Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Streets.¹⁴⁷ The first project listed is the development of the Castle Museum of the Meagher County Historical Society. Other projects include highway reconstruction, redeveloping vacant lots, and supporting and attracting small businesses such as 2 Basset Brewery, Twin Sisters Trading Post, and Red Ants Pants.¹⁴⁸

Comparing the White Sulphur Springs plan to the Meagher County plan the disparities become obvious. While some of these differences may be due to the passage of time between the two plans, the more likely influence is the subtle divergence between the city's priorities and the county's priorities. Whereas the authors of the Meagher County plan feature the Black Butte Copper Project as the county's principal objective, the structure and content of the White Sulphur Springs plan demonstrates some underlying hesitations in regards the potential development. The White Sulphur Spring plan reinforces that the scope and form of the community's future growth is uncertain, and that the city needs to establish sustainable practices, regardless of the mine. The plan also devotes much less document space to discussing the mine. The sections that do discuss it feature language that suggests caution. The authors point to the region's history of resource extraction, and states that more analysis needs to be conducted to determine the potential economic and community effects of the mine. What the White Sulphur Springs plan lacks in terms of discussing the mine, it makes up for in emphasizing the city's potential as a hub for tourism and small businesses.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 46.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 47-51.

In an interview, Jim Richard, chair of the White Sulphur Springs planning commission, provided additional insight into the city's plans for the future. Richard, who grew up on a cattle ranch outside of Miles City, has worked in planning and economic development in small towns across the state for several decades. He and his wife, who used to work as a consulting team, chose to live in White Sulphur Springs for its central location.¹⁴⁹

Richard emphasizes two items regarding the City's development goals. First, he explained, that although local preservation has occurred on a case-by-case basis, the community's history is very important to residents and will serve as another factor in tourism growth. Second, he reiterated that the Black Butte Copper mine, if it is approved, will be a temporary addition to the county. He stressed that regardless of whether or not the mine is approved, the city should establish an economic development council, an entity that existed when Richard first moved to White Sulphur Springs.¹⁵⁰

Signs of Progress

Several recent projects have sparked the collaborative spirit of White Sulphur Springs' residents and business owners. The most buzz-worthy among them are the newly completed public school, the installation of historic-inspired street lamps along Main Street, and the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce's Art and Cultural Trail. Each of these projects were prompted by community demand, and each was primarily

¹⁴⁹ Jim Richard (Chairman of the White Sulphur Springs Planning Commission) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

funded through the community by individual contributions. In the face of difficult financial circumstances, residents are prioritizing the future of White Sulphur Springs in a way that will make it a better place to live, work, and play.

The new White Sulphur Spring School opened its doors in December of 2017. After years of deferred maintenance, the previous elementary and high school buildings, both erected during the 20th century, were in a state of disrepair. A new, combined school was essential in ensuring that White Sulphur Springs students would be able to still receive their education locally. Putting aside personal financial hardships, the residents of White Sulphur Springs agreed to support a bond to fund its construction.

Larry Markuson, superintendent of the White Sulphur Springs School District, shared his excitement about the new building in an interview one week after the construction was complete. Markuson, a native of Circle, Montana, is well aware of the importance of investing in education in rural areas. Prior to assuming his role in White Sulphur Springs, Markuson served as superintendent of several small school districts, including that of Hot Springs, Montana on the Flathead Reservation. He and his wife, a teacher and guidance counselor, were living-out a long distance relationship between Augusta and Hot Springs and chose to make White Sulphur Springs their new home when positions in their respective fields became available. White Sulphur Springs is the largest district that Markuson has overseen, and it came with the largest problems.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Larry Markuson (Superintendent of the White Sulphur Springs School District) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

During his first week on the job in the summer of 2014, Markuson was told by the county sanitarian that the schools were going to be shut down unless significant structural improvements were made. Markuson described the gravity of the situation in stating that at the elementary school, “there were cinderblocks falling out of the walls that were right above the doorway in the basement. The first week of school that year, we had the sewer back up into the cafeteria, so we got that cleaned up and we ate off of paper plates from the end of August until the middle of October.”¹⁵² Describing a similar set of sewage concerns at the high school, Markuson stated that “the pipes were so bad that they literally didn’t have to disconnect anything, they just grabbed the urinal and pulled it off the wall.”¹⁵³

Markuson and members of the school board organized a series of community meetings to discuss the future of the school. Three options emerged from the discussions: fix the only the immediate health and safety concerns, significantly remodel the existing structure and add some new construction, or demolish the buildings and start from scratch. The second option was ultimately chosen. The project was projected to cost upwards of \$10 million, \$8 million over the district’s annual budget. To finance the proposed school, the city passed a bond for \$9.4 million. In addition, the district received a \$75,000 grant from the Baer Foundation and several smaller donations from organizations such as the Red Ants Pants Foundation. From the planning stage to its completion, the school project was an overwhelming display of community pride and perseverance.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Markuson is optimistic about the potential Black Butte Copper Project and its impact on the school. Though he doesn't foresee that the school's population, currently 200 students, will increase significantly as a result of the mine, he is certain that the county's tax revenue will. White Sulphur Springs currently has a taxable valuation of \$8 million. This figure is predicted to grow to \$24 million when the mine is in operation. He hopes that this shift will alleviate some of the financial burden of maintaining the school with tax-paying residents and businesses. He also discussed how Tintina has been a partner to the school district. As construction was nearing completion, Tintina donated an electric sign for the school. Furthermore, he explained that since many of Tintina's staff are White Sulphur Springs residents, they and their families are active members of the school board.¹⁵⁵

Other community-led projects are beautifying White Sulphur Springs streets and bringing awareness to the county's rural heritage and scenic landscape. Kimm Hamm, a local photographer and Vice President of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce elaborated on the installation historic-inspired street lamps on Main Street and the progress of the Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail. Hamm grew up in Helena, Montana. She lived out of the state for twenty years until her husband, a doctor, accepted a position at the Mountainview Medical Center in White Sulphur Springs. Hamm quickly found her own niche in the community by taking senior portraits, teaching photography lessons, and getting involved in the Chamber.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Kim Hamm (local photographer and Vice President of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

One of the Chamber of Commerce’s most recent successes was the historic lamp project. Hamm asked, “have you heard about how much money we raised to put the lights up?”¹⁵⁷ The figure was a staggering \$126,000-worth of individual donations. In addition to providing an a more attractive light source for the city’s primary road, the lamp project was an opportunity to leave a physical mark on the community. Hamm stated that “people saw value in it because they could put their family name on it. For \$2,000 you could get your plaque on there, forever.”¹⁵⁸ In an interview, Tash Wisemiller of the Montana Main Street program also referenced the inclusivity of the project, explaining that donors had the option to contribute as little or as much as they wanted.¹⁵⁹

When asked about the importance of having a cohesive historic main street in a rural community, Hamm stated that she thinks “that is the draw.”¹⁶⁰ She explained that “we don’t want hoity-toity trendy things in little communities. We want to see the Wild West, the history of our rodeo, the history of the buildings of the lumber and the mining here.”¹⁶¹ The current heritage tourism effort of the Chamber of Commerce is the Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail (Figures 2.18 and 2.19). The trail features painted barn quilts, public art, and historic sites throughout the county. Individuals and business owners from across the county have painted barn quilts to reflect particular buildings, industries, or their own identity within the community.¹⁶² In

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Kim Hamm (local photographer and Vice President of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

December of 2017, Jim Dolan, a Montana-based sculptor donated a horse sculpture to be included as part of the trail (Figure 2.20). Residents have caught on to the trend, and the list of stops along the trail continues to grow.



Figure 2.18: A December 2017 view of Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail barn quilts near the Teslow grain elevator on the edge of town. From the author.



Figure 2.19: A December 2017 view of newly installed lamppost and a Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail barn quilt at Meagher Motor. From the author.



Figure 2.20: A December 2017 view of the Jim Dolan horse sculpture on Main Street in White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

CHAPTER 3

A NEW ERA OF NATURAL RESOURCE EXTRACTION



Figure 3.1: White Sulphur Springs business owners and residents show support for the Black Butte Copper Project. From the author.

Natural resources have always been the lifeblood of Meagher County's economy, but, the regional narrative surrounding the appropriate use of those resources is changing. Can natural resource extraction, particularly mineral extraction, occur in a way that is sustainable, environmentally, economically, and socially? This is a question that White Sulphur Springs residents are currently trying to answer. If the Black Butte Copper Project, overseen by Sandfire Resources America, Inc., is

approved, it will be the first new mine in Montana in over thirty years.¹⁶³ This fact and the mine's proximity to the scenic Smith River have contributed to the sensational press that the project has received during the environmental review period over the past year.

This chapter seeks to explore the assertions of both sides of this environmental conflict. The chapter will begin with an analysis of literature pertaining to the history and consequences of mining in the Western United States. Next, a brief overview will be provided of Sandfire Resources America, Inc. and their plans for the Black Butte Copper project, followed by a discussion of the timeline of and contention surrounding the ongoing permitting process. The chapter will conclude with an examination of Sandfire's relationship with White Sulphur Springs and their vision for future. Representatives of Sandfire do not pretend that the Black Butte Copper Project will be the solution to all of White Sulphur Springs economic challenges. Instead, they hope that they can partner with the county and the city to make the most of their temporary coexistence.

The Impact of Modern Mining in the West

The Old West conjures images of cowboys, Conestoga wagons, and prospectors panning for gold, but how much did mining really impact the United States' westward expansion and the growth the 19th century American economy? Thomas M. Power, an economist and mining expert at the University of Montana,

¹⁶³ Nancy Schlepp (Vice President of Communications at Sandfire Resources America, Inc.) In discussion with the author, December 2017.

challenges the validity of hardrock mining as a sustainable economic development strategy. He reflects on how political leaders often reference the importance of mining in the early history of the United States when advocating for its positive impacts. Power asserts that mining, alone, has never been a significant driver for economic development on a national scale in the United States, despite the “folklore” history that proclaims the significance of the industry.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, he emphasizes that the high environmental and social costs associated with mining often outweigh its potential benefits.¹⁶⁵

In his report, “Digging to Development: A Historical Look at Mining and Economic Development,” Power analyzes this folklore history. He argues that just because mining development preceded our nation’s rise to economic dominance does not mean that it was the sole stimulant. During the late-19th century, mining’s golden era in the United States, hardrock resources only represented 6.5% of the nation’s exports.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the geographic expanse of the American West allowed for the boom-bust cycle that followed mining projects. If a certain mine was no longer profitable, the company could pick up and leave to try its hand at another location. Towns that did not have diverse economies often fell into decline or completely disappeared. Small communities, even those today, typically do not have the capacity to weather such dramatic shifts.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Michael Power, “Digging to Development? A Historical Look at Mining and Economic Development,” *Oxfam America*, (September 2002): 8.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

Power also discusses the regional impact of mining in the United States.

Copper became an important natural resource with the expansion of electricity during the late 19th century.¹⁶⁷ Copper mining began in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and quickly moved to the American West, particularly Montana.¹⁶⁸ These mines generated vast wealth, but few reaped the benefits. In recent years, many historically mining-dependent counties have experienced a surge in population and economic growth, but this is largely due to the aesthetic appeal of their mountainous landscapes, as opposed to the continued extraction of copper.¹⁶⁹

Power analyzed labor earnings, per capita income, and demographic statistics to quantify the performance of contemporary American mining counties. He concluded that mining counties do not outperform counties that do not rely as heavily on resource extraction.¹⁷⁰ Power makes two points based on his findings. First, mining counties exhibit high unemployment rates. Miners who are laid off usually don't seek employment elsewhere because they are not likely to find a job that pays as well. Second, mining dependent counties are less likely to have diverse economies, and thus suffer when the company leaves.¹⁷¹

As discussed in Chapter 1, the Mountain West is situated at the confluence of traditional industrial/agricultural and post-industrial ideologies. Although the regional mining industry has weakened significantly over the past century, the emergence of the New West and its environmentally-charged values has accelerated its demise.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 21-22.

Scholars William N. R. Holden, Daniel Jacobson, and Kristen Moran discuss the history and present state of civil society opposition to hard rock metal mining in Montana. Their analysis covers Montana's association with mining from the late-19th century through the present day. Whereas the Anaconda Copper Mine more-or-less governed the politics and economy of the state from the 1890's through the early 1970's, current public sentiment towards the industry has all but driven large-scale mining out of Montana's mountains.

Montana is the "Treasure State" and its motto is "Oro y Plata," or gold and silver in Spanish. Both symbols underscore how closely the state's beginnings were tied to the mining industry.¹⁷² The most infamous mining company to do business in Montana was the Anaconda Copper Company. Anaconda began excavating copper ore near Butte, Montana during the 1880's. The company quickly rose to prominence and manipulated much of Montana's political and economic interests between the 1890's and the 1970's. Anaconda not only controlled most of the state's mines, but they also owned entities ranging from hotels to local newspapers. During the 1950's, Anaconda acquired extensive copper deposits in Chile and slowly began to turn its focus away from its Montana holdings. Ultimately, Anaconda's relationship with the Chilean government turned sour during the 1970's, by which time its footing in Montana had disintegrated.¹⁷³

Contemporary Montana residents are quick to criticize mining due to scars left by Anaconda and because of the increasing concern regarding mining's environmental

¹⁷² William N. Holden, R. Daniel Jacobson, and Kirsten Moran, "Civil Society Opposition to Nonferrous Metals Mining in Montana," *Voluntas* 18 (2007): 267.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 269-271.

side effects. To expand on the latter issue, the authors discuss three high profile examples from the 1990's, the Zortman-Landusky project, the New World Mine, and the McDonald Mine.

The Zortman-Landusky project, managed by Pegasus Gold, was a mine located in North-Central Montana, just south of the Fort Belknap Reservation. The project, which had been in operation since the late 1970's, exposed itself to scandal when the mine experienced its first cyanide leak in 1981. Cyanide is a toxic chemical that is used to bond microscopic particles of gold ore. Another leak occurred in 1983, triggering significant backlash from nearby communities. The project was also denounced for causing acid mine drainage. Acid mine drainage occurs when sulfuric acid is released during the mining process and is near impossible to stop once it has begun. The Fort Belknap Reservation brought a series of lawsuits against Pegasus Gold, but to no avail. The company went bankrupt in 1998, thus forgoing their environmental responsibilities. Remediation of local water contamination tied to the Zortman-Landusky project still poses a financial burden on Montana taxpayers.¹⁷⁴

The New World Mine and the McDonald Mine were both stopped in their tracks by environmental interest groups, and never proceeded beyond the proposal stage. The New World Mine was to be located in the Gallatin National Forest, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park. Because of the seismic activity in the area, there were ample concerns regarding acid mine drainage. Opponents to the project voiced that the mine could potentially contaminate the Yellowstone River and that the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 273-274.

presence of the mine, with its close proximity to the park, would deter from the scenic experience of the Yellowstone backcountry.¹⁷⁵

The McDonald Mine experienced similar resistance. Widespread apprehension in Northwest Montana that the project would negatively impact the Blackfoot River, one of the state's premier fly fishing destinations. The salient commonality between all three of these cases is that majority of the opposition came from grassroots organizations comprised of individuals from a variety of backgrounds. For example, Friends of the Rocky Mountain Front, a group that advocates for environmental protection in Western Montana, is comprised of farmers and businessmen. Despite their grassroots nature, these organizations drew political support at the regional and state level.¹⁷⁶

The mining industry's interest in Montana has undergone significant decline over the past several decades. However, it is unlikely that this decline has contributed to the state's poor economy. The scholars offer four reasons why mining's exit has gone largely unnoticed. First, because modern mining is capital-intensive rather than labor-intensive, it offers very few jobs that stimulate the economy. Second, very few links exist between mining and other regional industries. The specialized goods and services needed to operate a mine would not be supplied by nearby small towns. Furthermore, it is unlikely that extracted metal ore would be sold locally. The third issue lies in disparity between Western and Eastern Montana. If the decline of mining were the reason behind Montana's economic strife, it would disproportionately affect

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 274.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 274-275.

the mountainous counties of Western Montana. Those same counties are the state's most affluent. Hence, Montana's "waning" Eastern counties are the primary force behind the lag in Montana's economy. Fourth, the exorbitant costs associated with mining often extend beyond mines' finite lifetimes, thus making mining an unattractive business venture.¹⁷⁷

The authors conclude by elaborating on the impact of Montana's growing "New West" population, cheekily referring to it as the transition from "Treasure State to the Last Best Place." Montana's mountain counties are witnessing an influx in upper-middle class residents. These newcomers have portable incomes that allow them to live in locations with attractive natural resource amenities. The "New West" population is interested in Montana's natural landscape for its aesthetic beauty and recreational opportunities, not its extraction potential. Therefore, these individuals play a major role in the present opposition to mining.¹⁷⁸

Holden, Jacobson, and Moran point to the underlying flaws in the assumption that traditional mining can be a viable long-term economic development strategy. When applied to the case of White Sulphur Springs, the scholars' argument suggests that the proposed Black Butte Copper mine will not foster a symbiotic relationship with the community. There is little that White Sulphur Springs can offer the mine in terms of man power, expertise, equipment, or processing, and it is unlikely that the products of the mine will be sold locally. The argument also emphasizes that, because modern mines are capital-intensive, the Black Butte mine will only exist as long as

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 285-288.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 288-289.

there is copper left to excavated. Montana's population that identifies as "New West" will continue to oppose the mine for its potential impact on the natural amenities and landscape that make Meagher County an attractive recreation destination.

Scholars have written extensively about this mine-community relationship. Raymond L. Gold, a former sociology professor at the University of Montana, wrote his text, *Ranching, Mining, and the Human Impact of Natural Resource Development*, to provide an overview of how large-scale industrial development can disrupt the social structure of rural communities in the Mountain West. This work, published in 1985, came at a time when the field of social impact assessing was just beginning to mature.

Through extensive interviews with residents of small towns across the region, Gold developed a fictional town named Sagebrush. Sagebrush is intended to serve as the prototypical agricultural or natural resource-based community that might be found in states such as Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, or the Dakotas.¹⁷⁹ Gold introduces a coal mine to Sagebrush, a town of 1,300 residents, and demonstrates the ways in which local attitudes change towards development and their sense of community over successive stages of the project. Gold asserts that, in a region where social and economic change occurs markedly slow compared to the rest of the United States, the sudden infusion of industrial development can bring rapid, unstable transformations. More importantly, Gold emphasizes the need for considering the social benefits and

¹⁷⁹ Raymond L. Gold, *Ranching, Mining, and the Human Impact of Natural Resource Development* (New Brunswick: Transaction, Inc, 1985), 10.

costs of natural resource development, in addition to its effects on local economies and the environments.

Gold conducted ethnographic research throughout the 1970's to establish the basis of his fictional case study. Interview responses pertaining to real-life development situations were used throughout the text. Following an introduction to existing social impact assessment scholarship, Gold dives into Sagebrush's story. He begins by describing the imagined history, demographics, and physical characteristics of the town. Disruption to this quiet ranching community begins with the announcement of a new coal mine in the area. The remainder of the text follows the timeline of the mining project from proposal to completion, detailing the various social changes occurring within Sagebrush along the way.

Sagebrush is a town of approximately 1,300 residents, most of whom have lived in the community for more than a decade, if not their entire lives. The town is divided into four distinct rural neighborhoods, each with their own nuanced characteristics. The closest urban center to Sagebrush is 150 miles away.¹⁸⁰ The social structure of Sagebrush is similar to what German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies refers to as *Gemeinschaft*, a form of interactional organization defined by informal lifestyles and strong interpersonal bonds. This is typified by rural communities.¹⁸¹ Gold explains that Sagebrush residents exhibit different behaviors to members of outer and inner social circles. Residents are often guarded towards out-of-towners, so as to preserve the integrity of their inner circle of close family and friends. Various groups

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 2-7.

within the community had their own informal networks, such as relationships between ranching families, where symbiosis was necessary for mutual survival.¹⁸²

The proposed coal mine was announced in the Junction City newspaper. Sagebrush had experienced mining development in the past, and residents predicted that this would be just another passing phase in the towns abiding agricultural economy.¹⁸³ Ranchers were the first feel pressure from the mining company, comically named Bighole. At the outset, ranchers were supportive of the mine because many poised to benefit financially and the majority felt that the mine would serve the greater public good while the country was in the midst of an energy crisis. Those who were concerned about the mine were afraid of speaking up, fearing that they might alienate their neighbors and friends.¹⁸⁴ As the initial excitement surrounding the mine began to wane, apprehension rose as to how the mine might negatively impact ground water, a major consideration for ranchers. Tension grew between ranchers as some sold out to the company, while others were left to fend for themselves.¹⁸⁵ The Rangeland Protective Association was formed to mobilize members of the ranching community who wanted to form a collective voice against the mine.¹⁸⁶ Townspeople and small business owners were uneasy, as well, unsure of what the rapid population influx might affect the local economy and social scene.

¹⁸² Ibid., 7-10.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 25-27.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 34.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 38.

Merchants were in a state of limbo, not knowing if or how they should expand their businesses.¹⁸⁷

Impact of the mine construction was felt throughout Sagebrush and the surrounding area. The process was slow, taking several years for activities to reach their peak. Ranchers lost many of their hired-hands to the mining company. Property values and taxes increased, disproportionately affecting the poor and the elderly. Residents complained about the noise and “people” pollution. Many residents opted for staying at home or travelling to Junction City for leisure and entertainment. The most significant change during this phase of the project was the tightening of inner social circles.¹⁸⁸

By the time that the mine was fully operational, the town had physically changed. Mobile homes had taken the place of previously vacant lots. These had served as housing for temporary workers during the construction phase and were now occupied by low-wage employees of the mine or other local businesses. A small housing subdivision had been constructed near the highway on the outskirts of town.¹⁸⁹ Social circles began to loosen, as old-time and new residents got to know each other. Some newcomers became “cultural converts,” establishing their own roots in the community. Although the perceived quality of life for long-term residents was lower than normal during the construction phase, Gold expresses that the traditional

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 50.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 67-68.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 89.

Gemeinschaft social structure was on the rise during the year following the completion of the project.¹⁹⁰

Like many real-world mining companies, Bighole was far more concerned with the economic and environmental impact of their project rather than the social impact. Gold mentions the Cyprus Mining Company near Challis, Idaho as a positive example of how a company should interact with local residents and businesses in formulating an Environmental Impact Statement in a way that incorporates social and cultural values. Such an approach would have saved Bighole time and effort during the permitting process and would have preserved its relationships with influential members of the community.¹⁹¹

Despite the passing of over thirty years since this book was published, the demographic and physical similarities between Sagebrush and White Sulphur Springs are startling. From topography to town layout, the two communities are nearly identical. The placement of the mine projects in relation to the town cores is also comparable, the coal mine being 15 miles from Sagebrush and the copper mine being 18 miles from White Sulphur Springs. Like the report produced by Bighole, the social impact section of Sandfire's initial environmental assessment is scant, at best. In Sandfire's ongoing studies, it will be important for them to assess how the mine will affect White Sulphur Springs before, during, and after the project.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 90-91

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 139-140.

The Black Butte Copper Project

The origins of the Black Butte Copper Project began in 1985, when Jerry Zeig, current Senior Vice President of Sandfire Resources America, Inc., discovered the copper deposit. Zeig was born and raised in White Sulphur Springs. As a child, Zeig accompanied a USGS geologist while he was mapping the area, which sparked his interest in the profession. While pursuing his degree in geology at the University of Montana, Zeig was hired by Cominco America, Inc. to prospect for zinc in his home county, an exploratory project that resulted in his master's thesis. After nine years of working at Cominco, Zeig was unsuccessful in finding zinc. Instead, he found copper. The deposit was named after Johnny Lee, an early 20th-century homesteader who unknowingly lived directly above the copper ore. Copper prices were very low, at the time, and the Cominco did not pursue excavation.¹⁹²

Interest in the rich copper deposit was reignited in 2008 and 2009 when the price of copper was beginning to rise, at which time local ranchers were approached by 17 mining companies. The ranchers got together and agreed that if a mine was going to be developed, “they wanted Jerry Zeig involved.”¹⁹³ Zeig, who was then working for NovaGold, Inc. in Alaska, established Tintina Resources, Inc. in response. The Black Butte Copper Project, if approved, will be the company's first venture. Currently, the Johnny Lee deposit represents the second highest grade copper vein under permit in the world.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Nancy Schlepp (Vice President of Communications at Sandfire Resources America, Inc.) In discussion with the author, December 2017.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ “What is the Johnny Lee Deposit?” Black Butte Copper Project, 2018, <https://blackbuttecopper.com/faqs/what-is-the-johnny-lee-deposit/>.

In 2010, Tintina applied for and received an exploration license from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). This license allowed the company to begin core drilling and conduct an aquifer pump test on the site. Based on their findings, Tintina proceeded with their application for an Operating Permit for an underground copper and related minerals mine on December 15, 2015, which was officially granted in September of 2017. This began the Environmental Impact Statement Process, which the company hopes to complete by the beginning of 2019.

Tintina Resources officially changed its name to Sandfire Resources America, Inc. in February of 2018. Sandfire Resources NL, a mining corporation based in Australia, has a controlling interest Sandfire Resources America, Inc., 78.1%, the parent company of Tintina Resources, Inc. In a press release, Chief Executive Officer John Shanahan stated that in their effort to maintain transparency throughout the remainder of the permitting and review process that the company should be “clear with all shareholders and stakeholders regarding the ongoing financial and technical support of our majority shareholder, Sandfire Resources.”¹⁹⁵ Sandfire Resources NL is a relatively new mining corporation. Established in 2004, it quickly became a middle-tier minerals producer with an international scope. In addition to the Black Butte Copper Project, Sandfire operates several hard rock mines in Western Australia. Sandfire’s overseas management is among the many concerns of opponents to the project.

¹⁹⁵ “Tintina Announces Name Change,” Sandfire Resources America, Inc., January 31, 2018, <http://www.sandfireamerica.com/news/news-releases/2018/tintina-announces-company-name-change>.

The Conflict

As part of the Environmental Impact Statement process, public hearings were held over a 45-day scoping period in several Central Montana towns during the fall of 2017. Several environmental groups and thousands of Montana residents expressed their fears regarding the Black Butte Copper Project, but its most outspoken opponents have been the “Save Our Smith” community and Montana Trout Unlimited. Both organizations object to the mine for its potential negative impacts on the Smith River, Montana’s only permitted recreational body of water.¹⁹⁶ Save Our Smith is a coalition of citizens who organized to spread information about the mining project and petition the state government to reconsider its consequences to the environment. Similarly, Montana Trout Unlimited, based in Missoula, has made the protection of the Smith River their primary advocacy focus in recent years. Their principal concern is that the mine will dewater and contaminate Sheep Creek, a tributary of the Smith River, and harm the native trout population.¹⁹⁷ The claims of these groups are well-founded, especially considering Montana’s history of mining, but there is a substantial disconnect between their cause and the local community. Those who oppose the mine are primarily from outside of Meagher County.

Sandfire argues that that through using “best practice mining techniques” the operation will have little to no negative impact on the Smith River ecosystem. As planned, all entrances to the mine will be constructed above the water table and excavated tunnels will be filled with processed rock material to prevent subsidence

¹⁹⁶ “About the Smith,” Save Our Smith, 2016, <http://www.saveoursmith.com/>.

¹⁹⁷ “Smith River Protection,” Montana Trout Unlimited, no date, <https://montanatu.org/smith-river-2/>.

and water flow. All surface-level facilities will be situated away from surface water, particularly Sheep Creek. Water used for mining operations will be drawn from underground by dewatering the mine. A retired water lease upstream from Sheep Creek will be used to ensure that the stream will not decrease in flow during the life of the project.¹⁹⁸

The Community Perspective

In an article for the *Prairie Populist* regarding the Montana Department of Environmental Quality's review of the proposed copper mine, writer Andie Creel described issue at the heart of the Black Butte conflict in stating:

In the thousands of comments on the proposed Black Butte Copper Mine near the headwaters of the Smith River, two sides were clear: those who wanted the Smith to remain untouched and those who wanted the river to remain untouched but also wanted economic development in the area.¹⁹⁹

The Smith River is just as important to the history and people of White Sulphur Springs as it is to the tourists that enjoy its recreational offerings. As opposed to the environmental groups that have cried-out against Sandfire, residents of Meagher County argue that the operation of the mine and conserving the river are not mutually exclusive.

In an interview, Nancy Schlepp, native of Ringling and current Vice President of Communications at Sandfire, was eager to share her views on the positive

¹⁹⁸ "Protecting the Water," Black Butte Copper Project, 2018, <https://blackbuttecopper.com/environment/#protecting>.

¹⁹⁹ Andie Creel, "Thousands Remain Invested in the Smith River," *Prairie Populist*, January 26, 2018, <http://prairiepopulist.org/invested-in-smith-river/>.

relationship between the mine and the community. Schlepp conveyed that the company has a personal stake in White Sulphur Springs, not only for its minerals, but for its people. Schlepp grew up on and now owns the Higgins Ranch outside of Ringling, a property that has been in her family since 1896. All three of her children attended school in White Sulphur Springs and her husband is a member of the school board.²⁰⁰

Prior to assuming her role at Sandfire, then Tintina, in 2013, Schlepp worked for the Montana Farm Bureau Federation and the Montana Tax Bureau Association, which introduced her to the varied interests of Montana's diverse population. She also served four years as County Commissioner for Meagher County, during which time she was approached by Tintina. After taking time to consider the history and leadership of the company, she agreed to join their public relations team. In explaining her decision, Schlepp stated that, "I am going to live here for the rest of my life, and I want my kids to have the opportunity to come back" and to "bring good paying jobs and families to this community."²⁰¹

Although Schlepp and her coworkers are personally invested in improving the economy in White Sulphur Springs, the Hard Rock Mining Impact Act will require Sandfire to assess the mine's socioeconomic impact on the community before they can receive a Record of Decision from the DEQ. The Montana Division of Community Development explains the process and its intended purpose:

Under the Hard-Rock Mining Impact Act, the developer of each proposed new large-scale hard-rock mine in Montana is required to prepare an impact plan

²⁰⁰ Nancy Schlepp (Vice President of Communications at Sandfire Resources America, Inc.) In discussion with the author, December 2017.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

that identifies the local government services and facilities that will be needed as a result of the mineral development. In the impact plan, the developer must identify and commit to pay all increased local government capital and net operating costs that will result from the development. Payment may be through grants or contributions, property tax prepayments, facility impact bonds, or other financing mechanisms. The developer may also provide non-financial assistance to the affected local government units.²⁰²

Schlepp stated Sandfire had not yet begun this report, but that they had already assembled a group of stakeholders, consisting of opponents and proponents, to discuss the mine and its connection to the environment, both natural and human.

Representatives from Montana One, a non-profit organization centered on bridging the gap between Montana's urban and rural populations, recently joined to group to help facilitate productive discussions.²⁰³

²⁰² "Hardrock Mining Impact Act," Montana Mining Association, 2016, <http://www.montanamining.org/hrmia/>.

²⁰³ Nancy Schlepp (Vice President of Communications at Sandfire Resources America, Inc.) In discussion with the author, December 2017.

CHAPTER 4

LOCAL RESOURCES AND CREATIVE SOLUTIONS

The previous chapters have explored the complicated, and constantly changing, role that natural and cultural resources play in the Mountain West. Like many other rural communities, White Sulphur Springs has experienced the boom-and-bust cycle of natural resource development. Now, the community is caught in the midst of an environmental conflict with ramifications that extend beyond Meagher County's borders. Longtime residents, many who have experienced the economic prosperity brought by formerly robust extractive industries, are pitted against statewide environmental interest groups that fear that the Black Butte Copper Project will negatively impact Meagher County's natural landscape.

Is it possible to make use of local natural resources in a way that promotes White Sulphur Springs' history and agricultural heritage? Several local business owners say yes. This chapter will examine three White Sulphur Springs-based companies, Red Ants Pants, 2 Basset Brewery, and Twin Sisters Trading Company. These businesses were chosen for their age, their emphasis on employing local materials and staff, and for the industries that they represent. All three provide value-added products that tip-their-hat to White Sulphur Springs' sense of place in a way that promotes tourism and fosters community engagement among residents. Specifically, this chapter will draw upon and discuss the interviews conducted with owners of these businesses. Interviewees were asked a set of standardized questions

regarding their business practices and goals, followed by a set of questions about White Sulphur Springs, more generally.

Within the broader context of this thesis, these businesses are significant for three reasons. First, each is successful in taking advantage of growth opportunities and trends that are consistent with the post-industrial trajectory of Montana's economy without losing sight of White Sulphur Springs' natural resource-dependent past and present. Second, each business serves multiple purposes within the community, and is highly receptive to the individual needs of residents. Third, while each business is motivated by profit, they are fundamentally driven by a desire to invest in White Sulphur Springs as a vibrant rural community with a full range of services. Instead of attempting to reconstruct White Sulphur Springs economy, the new generation of business are attempting to revitalize it.

Red Ants Pants



Figure 4.1: A December 2017 view of the Red Ants Pants storefront and headquarters located at 206 East Main Street in downtown White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

Red Ants Pants (Figure 4.1) opened its doors in 2006. In the beginning, Sarah Calhoun, the founder, had a single vision for her company: manufacture practical workwear for women. While working as a crew leader for Outward Bound in Colorado, Calhoun became thoroughly dissatisfied with trying to find work pants that fit properly. So, she decided to start her own clothing company.²⁰⁴ When asked about the beginnings of the Red Ants Pants brand, Calhoun recounted the following story:

It definitely came out of necessity. I didn't have any experience in business or the apparel industry, and honestly didn't even want to be in business, but I talked to some other brands to see if they would start a line of workwear for women and no-one really jumped at it. One guy said, if you're serious about

²⁰⁴ Sarah Calhoun (founder of Red Ants Pants) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

it, why don't you start your own company? And I was 25, I was super naive, and I was like, oh fine how hard could that be. Little did I know...so when I was in Bozeman I bought a copy of *Small Business for Dummies*, because I didn't even know what a business plan was, at that point, literally, and it's a great read. I was reading it my very first weekend in town at a coffee shop and a guy noticed the book and we got to talking and it turns out that for the past twenty years he had done production and design for Patagonia. It was a very fateful day, and he became a top mentor, and he is on my board of advisors to this day. So, he hooked me up with lots of contacts and advice in the industry, and then I started just learning everything I could about design and production and business management and financing and marketing and branding and all that good stuff. I spent about two years between that date and when we actually opened the doors up here in the fall of '06. So, in between, it was renovating the building and moving into town and getting all of our prototypes and designs finalized and sourcing fabric and learning how to sew just so I knew the production floor and getting everything into production with our cut and sew manufacturers up in Kent. Then we started selling pants!²⁰⁵

All of the products that Calhoun sells in her store, including the famous pants, are made in the Northwest from American materials. The pants are manufactured by a mother-daughter team outside of Seattle, Washington. Most of the store's other clothing items and gifts are sourced locally or from Montana. Calhoun indicates that about 40 percent of her sales are made in-person at her store in White Sulphur Springs, while the remaining 60 percent occur on the Red Ants Pants website. None of their products are on larger online platforms, such as Amazon. Red Ants Pants' customers vary widely, but most are women between the ages of 30 and 40 who work in agriculture, construction, or landscaping.²⁰⁶

Since Red Ants Pants' products are not sold in any other store, Calhoun and her team had to bring their product to their customers. At the outset, they toured

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

Montana and neighboring states in an airstream trailer as part of a marketing campaign that they dubbed “Tour de Pants.” Calhoun stated that:

“With Tour de Pants, we had an airstream trailer and we went on the road doing house parties for months and months on end for several years, just to get to know our customers face to face. We would come to town, unpack all the pants, and they would bring out all their friends for a party, and we had a beer sponsor, it was great. Then we’d get to know them and hear their stories and then pack up and go to the next town.”²⁰⁷

Red Ants Pants’ name recognition has grown considerably since their touring days.

Business was markedly slow during the worst years of the Great Recession, but sales have been on the climb ever since, with the most growth occurring after the first Red Ants Pants Festival in 2011. Media coverage of the pants and the festival has brought national visibility to the brand. Calhoun explained that:

The public interest story hits a lot of elements that I think a lot of people are excited about. Last year, we had an eight-page spread in the *John Deere Magazine*. We’ve had much bigger publications hit the *New York Times* and that sort of thing, but John Deere was just like through the roof, sales were insane for 2 to 3 months straight. Last year, overall, I think we are up 44%.²⁰⁸

When she is not on the road, Calhoun manages her business from a 19th-century Italianate, brick commercial building on Main Street. The Wellman Block, constructed in 1880, is one of the oldest extant buildings in White Sulphur Springs. Its original use was a saddle shop managed by James MacDonald. The building is named for William Wellman, also a saddle maker, who purchased the property in 1907. The Wellman Block was later acquired by the Gordons, White Sulphur Springs’ only African American family, at the time. Their son, Taylor Gordon, who briefly attained stardom as a singer and vaudeville performer during the Harlem Renaissance,

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

operated an antique store there upon his return from New York City.²⁰⁹ Calhoun selected the site for her shop based on its location and historic appeal. Calhoun explained that:

I certainly wanted a Main Street presence for the retail store. This was one of the few buildings for sale in town that was the right price point, but also a beautiful historic building. And, what's nice here is that you've got the living apartment back here for me, lots of yard space, two apartments upstairs that I use for rentals, so I could support myself while the business was getting going. And I love historic buildings, I think there is so much potential for those in small town rural America, for sure.²¹⁰

Calhoun's personal commitment to agricultural communities is just as compelling as her business model. Calhoun grew up on a farm in rural Connecticut. She studied environmental science at Gettysburg College before moving out West and was inspired to relocate to White Sulphur Springs after she read Ivan Doig's *This House of Sky*. Since her childhood, Calhoun has had a passion for small towns like White Sulphur Springs.²¹¹ When the opportunity presented itself, Calhoun expanded the Red Ants Pants brand to include a non-profit arm, the Red Ants Pants Foundation.

The mission of the Red Ants Pants Foundation is "to develop and expand leadership roles for women, preserve and support working family farms and ranches, and enrich and promote rural communities."²¹² Since its inception, the Red Ants Pants Foundation has provided more than \$100,000 in grant funding to numerous local organizations and rural communities across the state. The foundation's 2018 grant

²⁰⁹ Chere Juisto, "The National Register of Historic Places Form: Wellman Block." *United States Department of the Interior*, 1993.

²¹⁰ Sarah Calhoun (founder of Red Ants Pants) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² "Mission & Values," Red Ants Pants Foundation, 2018, <https://redantspantsfoundation.org/mission-and-values/>.

recipients include the American Legion, the Garfield County Fire Foundation, the Kalispell FFA, Make it Happen Montana, Miss Rodeo Montana, Inc., Turner Farms, the Wheatland County Chamber of Commerce, and Women Leading Montana.²¹³ In addition their community grant objective, the Red Ants Pants Foundation offers classes pertaining to women's leadership and traditional timber skills.

The Red Ants Pants Festival, perhaps the most well-known entity of Red Ants Pants, was started as a means of partially funding the operations of the Red Ants Pants Foundation. The annual music festival features country music performers from Montana, the Rockies, and beyond.²¹⁴ While the festival has brought in many well-known artists, such as Dwight Yoakam, the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and Merle Haggard, some of the most popular performers have been those who have a regional flare. Corb Lund (Figure 4.2), who has performed at the Red Ants Pants Festival on numerous occasions, brings songs that resonate with Montanans, particularly those who occupy Montana's rural prairies east of the Rocky Mountains. Each of his songs incorporate specific place names and traditions from places such as Montana, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, which has gained him a regional following throughout Canada and the Western United States.

Calhoun emphasized that White Sulphur Springs residents have been instrumental in the success of the festival. Regarding local involvement in the event, Calhoun stated that:

We have huge community support, we have everything from the ranch landowners donating the use of their land, to other folks donating augers and tractors and mowers and helicopters. All the school groups get involved with

²¹³ "Community Grants," Red Ants Pants Foundation, 2018, <https://redantspantsfoundation.org/grants/>.

²¹⁴ "Lineup," Red Ants Pants Music Festival, 2018, <https://redantspantsmusicfestival.com/2018-lineup/>.

fundraisers. The 4-H and the FFA brought a petting zoo to the kids tent this year and the junior year fundraising group filled in gopher holes for money. The football team collects trash every year just to help volunteer then all the local civic organizations like the rotary club and the historic association and the Meagher County Cattle Women and every group you can imagine, they do different fundraisers. The Cattle Women do a breakfast in the campground and that sort of stuff. There's lots of both personal and organizational ways that folks do get involved. We have over 220 volunteers throughout the festival, loads of those are locals, as well, that want to come help and be able to pitch in on that side.²¹⁵

In this respect, the Red Ants Pants is an effort of the entire White Sulphur Springs community, in which business owners and residents contribute to an event that celebrates Central Montana's sense of place.

²¹⁵ Sarah Calhoun (founder of Red Ants Pants) in discussion with the author, December 2017.



Figure 4.2: Country singers Hayes Carll and Corb Lund performing at the 2016 Red Ants Pants Music Festival. From the author.

Tied specifically to the Red Ants Pants Festival is the annual MontANTa Challenge. Leading up to the event, “Red” the ant is placed in front of businesses and cultural landmarks in rural areas throughout the state, prompting prospective festival-goers to explore Montana’s varied landscapes and heritage.²¹⁶ Individuals who choose to participate in the competition are expected to take photographs of each of the locations. Upon successful completion, the participants are entered into a drawing to win passes to that year’s Red Ants Pants Festival. During the lead-up to the 2016 festival, Havre, Montana was selected as a MontANTa location. Red was placed on the town’s iconic grain elevators beneath Montana’s then slogan “Get Lost...in Montana” (Figure 4.3).



Figure 4.3: A 2016 view of "Red" the ant on the grain elevators in downtown Havre, Montana, from the KNMC 90.1 Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/132839406764397/photos/pcb.1047971491917846/1047968091918186/?type=3&theater>.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

Calhoun has never regretted choosing White Sulphur Springs as her home and place of business. When asked about White Sulphur Springs as a place to visit and live, Calhoun had nothing but positive things to say, particularly about the town's location and Meagher County's natural amenities and outdoor recreation opportunities.

People say it's the middle of nowhere, but I think it's the middle of everywhere. We're halfway between Yellowstone and Glacier on the scenic route, so we have a lot of summer park and RV traffic coming through. Then we have a big rodeo here on Labor Day, pro rodeo, that's a big one. Fall hunting season we have excellent hunting, all sorts of big game. They have an early and late cow elk season now, so really from August through February we have massive hunting traffic coming through. Showdown ski hill is just north of here. The Spa Hot Springs here in town is a major draw. Then, the Smith River, of course, is a major blue ribbon trout stream. That's the only river in Montana that you need a permit to float. It's a very, very popular spot. So, we have year-round outdoor focused traffic and attractions, which is awesome, and of course the festival is a big one now, too. Ice fishing, as well. We are surrounded my national forests on every side, so obviously it is a beautiful place to be.²¹⁷

Calhoun feels that White Sulphur Springs is finally being recognized for its central location and its plentiful natural and cultural amenities. This recognition has, in part, been brought about by the Red Ants Pants Festival, but it has been bolstered by the other new businesses that are taking advantage of opportunities and trends that coincide with Montana's experience-driven post-industrial middle class. In closing, Calhoun shared that:

I think certainly just having the volume of people we see at the festival who now know that the town's here and that it's a quaint little town with a great hot spring, or we're going to come back for the ski hill, or doing weekend destination trips, or what not. I think that it's on people's radar a little bit more. I think it has always been on the map, obviously, but it's in bold now.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

2 Basset Brewery



Figure 4.4: Bassets Leroy and Stanley of White Sulphur Springs' 2 Basset Brewery, no date. From the 2 Basset Brewery Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/2BassetBrewery/photos/a.1479442469015335/1639955589630688/?type=3&theater>.

For a town its size, White Sulphur Springs has its fair share of bars and restaurants. What it did not have, until two years ago, was a brewery. 2 Basset Brewery, owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Barry and Chris Hedrich, opened in early 2016, just before the Red Ants Pants annual line-up release party. Their first major event was a huge success, and word quickly spread about this quirky brewery in White Sulphur Springs.

Barry and Chris Hedrich met each other over 30 years ago while working for the Decker Coal Company in Decker, Montana. Barry, from White Sulphur Springs, was working as a civil engineer and Chris, from Sheridan, Wyoming, was an accountant. After they married, the two managed a ranch in Ringling for a short period before moving permanently to White Sulphur Springs. Since they set down

roots in town, Barry has coached football at White Sulphur Springs High School and Chris has been the Vice President of the local Bank of the Rockies. After their children graduated from high school, the Hedrich's decided that they wanted to start a business that was more in-tune with their personal interests and would allow them to engage with the community. So, they set out to open a brewery.²¹⁹

Beyond their passion for brewing beer, the Hedrichs saw the financial viability of opening a brewery in White Sulphur Springs. Montana ranks fourth in the nation for craft brew-production, following Vermont, Oregon, and Colorado.²²⁰ In discussing the role that craft brew tourism played in their decision making, Chris stated:

White Sulphur Springs is so centrally located, that we have traffic through here all the time. We knew that the community of White Sulphur could not fully support a brewery. We have great, great support from the community, but they are just a small community. So, we knew we had to do something that would draw other people... We have the Smith River, we have the ski hill, we have hunting, we have a reservoir, so there's people coming here to recreate, and the brewery just became another draw.²²¹

Montana, as a whole, is home to a thriving network of craft breweries that serves as a tourism driver. The Montana Brewers Association (MBA) was formed in 1998 to bring awareness to statewide brewing establishments and to highlight the "increasing value and economic impact of the emerging brewing community."²²² The MBA asserts that "Montana breweries have become an integral piece of the experience of Montana, and are a cultural attraction for many tourists visiting our great state."²²³ In

²¹⁹ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²²⁰ Ann M. Fletchall, "Place-Making Through Beer-Drinking: A Case Studies of Montana's Craft Breweries." *Geographical Review* 106:4 (2016), 540.

²²¹ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²²² "About Us," Montana Brewers Association, 2018, <https://montanabrewers.org/about-us/>.

²²³ Ibid.

this vein, the MBA promotes breweries as a way to explore some of the more remote corners of Montana by providing a map of the “Montana Brewers Trail” on their website (Figure 4.5). For geographic reference, the MBA has depicted the location of ski resorts, wildlife, and other defining landscape features in relation to the location of each brewery. Situated at the crossroads of several potential routes is 2 Basset Brewery of White Sulphur Springs.



Figure 4.5: The Montana Brewer's Trail Map. From the Montana Brewers Association, <https://montanabrewers.org/trail-map/>.

When considering what they were going to name their brewery, the Hedrichs wanted to differentiate themselves from all of the other Montana establishments named after natural features.²²⁴ Across the state, breweries make use of local place names, topography, and local history in their branding. Scholar Ann M. Fletchall explains that the emphasis on localness asserts a defiance against mass-market products, furthering the sense of Montana's individualism and unspoiled natural beauty.²²⁵ Alternatively, the Hedrichs uniquely market their brewery as a family endeavor by naming their business after their beloved dogs, 2 Basset Brewery. "I don't want it to be corny, I want it to be fun," Chris said.²²⁶ The name of each beer is a reference to their two basset hounds, Stanley and Leroy (Figure 4.4). Some of the more comical titles include Woofta, Bad Bad Leroy Brown, and Drooligan. One of the few beers that does not adhere to the dog theme is the Festival Ale, a seasonal brew that is specially made for the Red Ants Pants Festival.²²⁷

As with Red Ants Pants, the brewery's next-door neighbor, having a Main Street location for their business was very important to the Hedrichs. 2 Basset Brewery is housed in a single-story cinderblock building that was formerly used as an auto parts store. Meagher Motor, the structure's former occupant, is now located in a newer structure two blocks down the street. The building underwent significant renovations before the brewery was opened in 2016.²²⁸ The completed interior

²²⁴ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²²⁵ Ann M. Fletchall, "Place-Making Through Beer-Drinking: A Case Studies of Montana's Craft Breweries." *Geographical Review* 106:4 (2016), 542-554.

²²⁶ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²²⁷ "Our Beer," 2 Basset Brewery, 2018, <http://2bassetbrewery.com/OurBeer.html>.

²²⁸ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

features barn wood from the nearby Camas Creek Cattle and Sheep Company and a pressed-tin ceiling that references the décor of Montana's historic saloons. Pictures of Stanley and Leroy abound throughout the space (Figure 4.6). On the exterior, the Hedrichs recently installed a beer-themed barn quilt as part of the Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.6: Stanley posing for the "Breaking Basset" farmhouse ale, 2017. From the 2 Basset Brewery Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/2BassetBrewery/photos/a.1479442469015335/1788043748155204/?type=3&theater>.



Figure 4.7: Beer-themed barn quilt installed on the exterior of 2 Basset Brewery in March 2018. From the 2 Basset Brewery Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/2BassetBrewery/photos/a.1691060311186882/1863372943955617/?type=3&theater>.

The Hedrichs brew fifteen different types of beer, all in-house. Whenever possible, they make use of grains grown by local farmers, particularly barley. After hay, barley is Meagher County’s most common crop by acreage.²²⁹ The malt barley used in 2 Basset’s beers is harvested in Meagher County and processed in Great Falls.²³⁰ While their ingredients are largely local, the Hedrich’s estimate that their clientele is approximately 50% out-of-towners. They predict that this is because

²²⁹ 2012 Census of Agriculture, “Meagher County, Montana,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, https://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Montana/cp3005_9.pdf

²³⁰ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

White Sulphur Springs is an easy day drive from several of Montana's larger cities. While the Hedrichs do not plan to distribute their product on a national scale, they hope that, in the future, they will be able to bottle and can their beer for regional bars to sell.²³¹

The Hedrichs explained the importance of the community to the success of their business and how they wanted their brewery to be a place where residents of all ages could come to relax and socialize. Because Montana's breweries have strict closing-time and drink limit restrictions, 2 Basset Brewery offers a family-friendly alternative to the town's many bars. The brewery attracts a lot "parents that want to come and have a beer, but they don't want to go to the bar."²³² The Hedrichs explained that it was common to see "families sitting down and playing a board game."²³³ In addition to their community-centric atmosphere, the brewery contributes financially to and participates in a myriad of local events, including Small Business Saturday, the annual Christmas Stroll, and Red Ants Pants' block party and festival.²³⁴

The Hedrichs are excited about the direction that White Sulphur Springs is moving. They feel that the community has experienced a "kind of resurgence" over the past few years. In discussing tourism, Chris stated that "what do we have, and what people can make a living off of- right now is the recreation, it's the tourism" and that businesses should collectively "make it more appealing for people to come here and stay two days, because then they support the brewery, the motels, the restaurants,

²³¹ Chris Hedrich (co-founder of 2 Basset Brewery) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

the grocery stores, the general stores, and the Town Pump.”²³⁵ However, the Hedrichs also feel that tourism should be supplemented by extractive industries that “create jobs without destroying the environment.”²³⁶ Referencing the proposed Black Butte Copper Project, Chris shared her view that “humans have decided to live on this earth, and we have decided that we like all of these comforts, and that’s not going to change. So, if we can do it and create jobs, and do it in a responsible way, is what I would like to see.”²³⁷ In summation, the Hedrichs expressed that regardless of the whether the mine is approved, they hope residents and business owners will continue to promote White Sulphur Springs as a great place stay, play, and enjoy good beer.²³⁸

Twin Sisters Trading Company

“My joke is that you can buy your ammo and your essential oils in one place,” said Alaina Gordon, co-owner of Twin Sisters Trading Company.²³⁹ Though this is certainly true, the primary goal of Twin Sisters Trading Company (Figure 4.8) is to provide White Sulphur Springs residents and visitors with a wide range of sporting goods and accessories. Despite its many recreational amenities, White Sulphur Springs lacked a comprehensive sporting goods outfitter until Twin Sisters Trading Company came on the scene. “It was one of those “necessity is the mother of all

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Alaina Gordon (co-founder of Twin Sisters Trading Company) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

invention” sort of things...Having to go all the way to Bozeman to buy \$5 worth of flies is really annoying.” Gordon said of the inspiration behind the store.²⁴⁰

Twin Sisters Trading Company opened in the fall of 2016. The store’s first location was on Highway 89, down the street from the Spa Hot Springs Motel. The wood-frame building, which had been sitting vacant and for sale for several years, was renovated to fit the needs and aesthetic tastes of its new owners. The interior of the structure features barn wood from a nearby ranch. In the parking lot, the company sign was constructed using timber from Fort Logan, a 19th century military base between White Sulphur Springs and the former location of Diamond City.²⁴¹

Twin Sisters Trading Company carries a wide range of products. Most of the store’s inventory caters to elk hunters and trout fisherman, who can stop-in to pick up supplies on their way to their destination. During the summer of 2017, the store began offering raft rentals to visitors who were in town to float the Smith River. This product has been very popular among out-of-towners; instead of hauling a raft from a rental location in Livingston, water recreationists can now obtain the necessary gear in White Sulphur Springs. The store also carries a selection healthcare products, apparel, and gifts, many of which are Montana-Made.²⁴² In many respects, Twin Sisters Trading company is an all-purpose general store with an emphasis on the outdoors.

The fall hunting season is when sales hit their yearly peak for Twin Sisters Trading Company. During this period, approximately 30 percent of the store’s customers are White Sulphur Springs residents while the remaining 70 percent are

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

visitors. The off-season has been difficult for the business, but this has prompted Gordon and her business partner to explore diversifying their products. During the interview, Gordon shared her goals to expand her store's physical footprint and its inventory while preserving its small-business feel. "It's already not Cabela's, but we want to make it cooler and weirder."²⁴³ In May of 2018, Twin Sisters Trading Company moved to its new location at the corner Main Street and South Central Avenue. The new building has allowed the company to expand their product base to include a fully-stocked liquor store.

Like the other business owners who were interviewed, Gordon is impressed by the recent changes being made in White Sulphur Springs. Gordon, whose first experience of White Sulphur Springs was attending the Red Ants Pants Festival three years earlier, senses that the town has undergone a "paradigm shift" and that "people are putting their trust in their dollars here." Gordon explained that reinvesting in the new school and updating aging infrastructure hasn't been easy. Property taxes and water bills have risen as a result, but ensuring that the community remains viable and attractive for residents and business owners is paramount.²⁴⁴

Gordon has seen a change in the types of businesses opening in White Sulphur Springs: "fun and vibrant" businesses staffed by young people.²⁴⁵ Among these businesses include Red Ants Pants, Bar 47, 2 Basset Brewery, and other service-related establishments. Gordon also stated that, despite owning a business that thrives

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

on tourism dollars, she was “not a fan of putting all the eggs in the tourism basket.”²⁴⁶ Gordon would like to see her business be successful by meeting the year-round needs of the people who live in White Sulphur Springs. She is also hopeful that the Black Butte Copper Project will bring much needed tax revenue to the community to alleviate the burden of public improvement projects.²⁴⁷



Figure 4.8: A 2017 view of Twin Sisters Trading Company in White Sulphur Springs. From the author.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

THE MONTANA MAIN STREET APPROACH

How can White Sulphur Springs promote diversified economic growth in a way that celebrates and makes use of its natural resource-based economy and heritage? The solution lies within a comprehensive approach to planning, preservation, and placemaking. The Montana Main Street Program, established in 2005, offers a framework for economic development that is fine-tuned to the needs of Montana’s diverse communities. Like the National Main Street Program, Montana Main Street encourages its participants to “utilize their local assets—historic architecture, cultural and natural resources and heritage, local enterprise and community pride.”²⁴⁸ Unlike the national model, however, Montana Main Street takes into consideration the uniquely rural context of the state’s sparsely populated geography. Montana Main Street is a valuable tool at White Sulphur Springs’ disposal and could provide the structure to maintain and incentivize the positive activities already occurring there.

Chapter 5 will begin with an examination of literature pertaining to economic development in small towns and rural areas. The next sections will provide an overview of the National Main Street Center and the Montana Main Street Program, elaborating on their similarities and differences. The section pertaining to the Montana Main Street Program will draw insight from an interview with Tash

²⁴⁸ Montana Main Street, “Main Street Four Points,” Montana Department of Commerce, no date, <http://comdev.mt.gov/Programs/MainStreet/FourPoints>.

Wisemiller, Montana Main Street Program Director and native of White Sulphur Springs. The final section will discuss potential steps forward for White Sulphur Springs, and other rural communities, in seeking to participate in Montana Main Street.

Capacity for Growth in Small Towns

For many small towns experiencing decline, the pervasive, inward-focused question is “what is wrong with us?” Instead, community leaders should critically consider the external economic and demographic forces that are causing the decline.²⁴⁹ Planner Thomas L. Daniels discusses the challenges and solutions to small town economic development that marked the second-half of the 20th century. Daniels states that no universal model for economic development exists, in part because of the diversity of small towns and the diversity of the backgrounds of professionals in the field.

Daniels identifies six primary areas of research that have been addressed in previous decades: history of small town development, theories of growth, individual strategies, specific program case studies, management practice, and the broader outlook for growth in small towns.²⁵⁰ Although he emphasizes the diversity of small town economic development literature, Daniels distinguishes a few principle ideologies throughout his report, including Neoclassical economics, Central Place

²⁴⁹ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²⁵⁰ Thomas L. Daniels, "Small Town Economic Development: Growth or Survival?" *Journal of Planning Literature* 4, no. 4 (Autumn 1989): 413-429.

Theory, and internal versus external combustion growth.²⁵¹ Furthermore, Daniels offers two questions that transcend the discourse: “What do these small towns aspire to be?” and “How do small towns grow and why do some grow and others decline?”²⁵² Daniels concludes that each small town is different, and requires its own set strategies to stimulate growth.

During the 19th century, small towns could aspire to become great cities. Daniels believes this goal is highly unrealistic in today’s well-defined economic landscape. During the Great Depression, support for small town economies was bundled into Federal farm policy.²⁵³ This made sense during the 1930’s, but fewer and fewer people in small towns have made their livelihoods from agriculture, since. Today, less than 2% of the American population is employed in farming.²⁵⁴

Despite changes in population and employment trends, many small towns are still dependent on various assistance programs at the Federal-level. These sources of funding were undermined by budget cuts during the Reagan administration, forcing small towns to lean on their state governments or become self-reliant.²⁵⁵ Growth in urban areas swelled during the 1980’s, as it became increasingly difficult to earn a living in small towns, especially those dependent on natural resource extraction. The towns that did grow were often within fifty miles of large urban centers, becoming bedroom communities for commuters or regional branch locations for larger national

²⁵¹ Ibid., 417-419.

²⁵² Ibid., 416.

²⁵³ Ibid., 415.

²⁵⁴ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 143.

²⁵⁵ Thomas L. Daniels, "Small Town Economic Development: Growth or Survival?" *Journal of Planning Literature* 4, no. 4 (Autumn 1989): 416.

firms.²⁵⁶ More commonly, the most remote small towns experienced net-outmigration, especially of young, working-age individuals, leaving behind aging populations.²⁵⁷

Daniels provides an overview of the popular small town economic development strategies during the 1980's. Daniels favors community-wide comprehensive planning as a strong approach. By incorporating a variety community factors, comprehensive planning for small towns seeks to improve a town's standing as a central place. Quantifiable business and population growth are important, but making the community a desirable place to live is critical. Daniels believes that downtown revitalization is a viable way to diversify local economies. The Main Street Program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (National Trust) promotes reinvestment through defining the community as an attractive destination, for work and play.²⁵⁸ In a sense, downtown revitalization is a form of internal combustion, growth from within, that focuses on entrepreneurship, retail trade, and service industries. Tourism often falls under this category. Daniels tempers this argument by stating that service industries cannot always serve as a sole economic base and that communities must stay vigilant regarding external market forces.²⁵⁹

Numerous "how-to" manuals for small town economic development surfaced during the 1970's and 1980's. Each technique reiterates the importance of assessing the strengths and weakness of a community before offering recommendations.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 414.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 416.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 420.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 420.

Daniels cites his own previous work, in which he suggested a model of inventorying exports and businesses, surveying the local labor force, documenting vacant properties, and taking note of residents' needs and goals. White Sulphur Springs addressed each of these items through their recent growth policy plan. Daniels stresses the need to look beyond the Neoclassical approach of production-based industry development and account for the distribution of costs and benefits across the community. Daniels concludes with a cautious, yet optimistic outlook for future small town economic development, with high hopes for the positive influence that improved telecommunications and information technology may have on remote areas.²⁶⁰

The Main Street Approach

The National Main Street Program of the National Trust has been the most lasting and successful solution for promoting heritage-based economic development in small towns.²⁶¹ During the late 1970's, Mary Means, the Director of the National Trust's Chicago office, identified the need for such a program in the Midwest. Looking to previous downtown restoration successes, such as that of the Market Street Restoration Agency of Corning, New York, Means and other staff members of the National Trust devised a comprehensive to strategy for promoting business-led revitalization in small cities and towns.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 425-426.

²⁶¹ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 142.

²⁶² Ibid., 152-154.

The fledgling Main Street Program found its footing in 1977 when the National Trust launched a three-year project involving the revitalization of downtown commercial buildings in Galesburg, Illinois; Hot Springs, South Dakota; and Madison, Indiana.²⁶³ The project leaders from each community were expected to rally support for private-sector reinvestment in their historic downtowns. The pilot programs brought to light the touchstones of the Main Street Approach that we know today, such as the need for a full-time project manager, a community wide commitment to historic preservation, effective public-private partnerships, and economic restructuring.²⁶⁴

The National Main Street Center was officially established in 1980, and the four-point Main Street Approach was formalized to include Organization, Design, Promotion, and Economic Restructuring. Successful Main Streets incorporate each of the four components, but each community prioritizes them differently to fit their existing assets and their long-term goals. The four-points, as defined by the National Main Street Center, are as follows:

- Economic Vitality: focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.
- Design: supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.
- Promotion: positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.
- Organization: involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ Kent A. Robertson, "The Main Street Approach to Downtown Development: An Examination of the Four-Point Program," *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 56.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶⁵ "The Main Street Approach," Main Street America, 2018, <https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theapproach>.

There have been several reviews of the program. Kent A. Robertson assessed the National Trust's Main Street Approach by examining how communities use the program. He conducted a survey of one hundred officially-recognized Main Streets across the United States, forty of which ultimately responded to his questionnaire. From the responses, Robertson selected four communities to discuss: Tupelo, Mississippi; Danville, Kentucky; Cushing, Oklahoma; and St. Charles, Illinois. He selected these four Main Streets because of their eagerness to participate in the study and their representativeness of the survey sample.²⁶⁶ Each program was asked to elaborate on how much of their time and resources was devoted to each of the four components of the approach. Promotion was the highest priority, but there was measurable variation between the communities based on their population size, distance from an urban center, and age of their Main Street program.²⁶⁷

Robertson completed his research in two phases. First, he and his colleagues sent a survey to one hundred Main Street communities from fifteen states. Forty of the questionnaires were completed and returned. Next, Robertson conducted site visits to four of the respondent communities—Tupelo, Danville, Cushing, and St. Charles. Of the four, Cushing had smallest population size, totaling 7,933 residents at the time of the survey.²⁶⁸ They were also situated the farthest from a major urban center, being 65 miles west of Tulsa, and featured the youngest Main Street program, established in 1998. Cushing was known for its identity as the “Pipeline Capital of the World,” a

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 59.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 59.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 59-60.

testament to region's dependence on oil extraction.²⁶⁹ Based on Cushing's size, location, and industrial characteristics, it serves as a useful comparison for White Sulphur Springs.

Across all forty of the respondents, Promotion was the most important component of the Main Street Approach, averaging 36.71% of communities' efforts. Design ranked second at 22.09%, Organization third at 21.20%, and Economic Restructuring at 19.18%. Robertson concluded that there was not a significant correlation between population size and the prioritization of the Promotion component. However, the Organization component was most popular among small towns, likely because they lacked financial and personnel resources, thus requiring a structure that would maximize efficiency. Conversely, communities with larger populations were able to devote more time to economic restructuring. With the youngest Main Street programs, Organization was also popular, whereas Promotion was applied more heavily among mature programs. Regarding proximity to urban centers with populations over 75,000, Promotion was emphasized for Main Streets that had to compete with larger retail and entertainment markets. Design spiked for remote communities, many of which had retained a higher density of historic buildings due to lack of development pressure.²⁷⁰

Robertson elaborates on the importance and use of each component of the Main Street Approach. Clear organization and program structure were found to be critical, especially for New Main Streets. Many of the respondent communities

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 59.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 60-62.

utilized a committee structure that mimicked the Main Street Approach, with a committee for each of the four components. In terms of funding, most of the respondent communities derived their funding from city governments, Business Improvement Districts, fundraising events, grants, or private donations. Among these, Business Improvement Districts offered the most predictable revenue stream. The primary promotion goal among respondents was to communicate the activities and improvements happening downtown. The use of special events, such as community-wide festivals or markets, was found to be the most effective promotional strategy.²⁷¹

Design was used by Main Streets to differentiate themselves from other historic downtowns. Robertson asserts that the most effective design strategy is one that connects the Mains Street's historic visual appeal to the community's sense of place. Robertson describes the desirability of certain New Urbanism design characteristics, such as walkable streets and high-density commercial buildings. The biggest challenge facing the design component among respondent communities was getting residents and business owners on-board with making physical improvements to their buildings. Finally, Robertson underscores that physical revitalization of downtown is not complete without economic restructuring. This is accomplished by assessing the types of businesses that are needed within the community. For example, Cushing, which had a large elderly population, chose to convert a vacant hotel into a senior housing facility.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Ibid., 62-64.

²⁷² Ibid., 65-69.

Robertson concludes by noting the implications of this research for planners and designers. Aside from the obvious fact that most planners work in communities that possess a downtown, planning professionals can make important contributions to the design component. Planners and preservationists have the technical training and expertise to affect changes to local ordinances, zoning, and attitudes towards adaptive reuse.²⁷³

The Montana Main Street Solution

Of the more than 1500 communities across the United States that are fully recognized by the National Main Street Center, only three are located in Montana. These include the Stevensville Main Street Association, Main Street Uptown Butte, Inc., and the Downtown Development Partnership of Great Falls.²⁷⁴ This is, in part, due to the structure and expectations of the national program. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Montana's rural nature inherently requires a different set of parameters than what is prescribed by the National Trust. In 2005, Montana Main Street was formed as one of 45 coordinating programs with the National Main Street Center.²⁷⁵ Housed in the state's Department of Commerce, Montana Main Street promotes historic preservation and heritage tourism as pieces of the broader economic development and revitalization that should occur in small towns.

²⁷³ Ibid., 70-71.

²⁷⁴ "The Programs," Main Street America, 2018, <https://www.mainstreet.org/mainstreetamerica/theprograms>.

²⁷⁵ Montana Main Street, "Overview," Montana Department of Commerce, no date, <http://comdev.mt.gov/Programs/MainStreet>.

Coincidentally, Tash Wisemiller, the Program Director for Montana Main Street, was born in Chicago and raised in White Sulphur Springs. Beginning when he was eight years old, Wisemiller and his family would take annual summer trips to Montana, and they officially moved to White Sulphur Spring when he turned fifteen. Wisemiller graduated from White Sulphur Spring High School and attended college in Montana. Today, his parents own the Spa Hot Springs Motel on Main Street. Wisemiller feels that his “juxtaposition of urban and rural,” has helped him to examine the economic processes at work in White Sulphur Spring from a broader perspective.²⁷⁶

Wisemiller explained the ways in which the Main Street Montana Program, being a subsidiary of the National Main Street program, has been crafted to fit the specific needs of Montana communities. When Wisemiller assumed his role in 2012, Main Street Montana “was a fledgling program because what it was doing was trying to put the model of the National Main Street framework onto small rural towns in Montana.”²⁷⁷ While Montana’s larger cities are the most vocal advocates for the program, it is the small towns that can benefit the most.

Though intimately connected with the guidance and branding of the National Main Street Center, Montana Main Street diverges from and builds upon the national model in several ways. In order to promote long range planning and downtown revitalization, Montana Main Street requires its participants to rise through the ranks of a tiered system. The “Affiliate Community” level, the point-of-entry for

²⁷⁶ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

prospective Main Streets, allows communities to take advantage of the resources that Montana Main Street has to offer, including training sessions, technical assistance, and grant funding, without a formal organization structure. At this level, communities are not required to have a paid Main Street staff member, but should demonstrate that the program has widespread support from volunteers and local officials. For this reason, the Affiliate Community status is an attainable for even for Montana's smallest towns. Participants are allowed to remain at this level, indefinitely, but are strongly encouraged to advance through the tiered system.²⁷⁸

The second level, "Designated Community," requires demonstrated implementation of the Main Street four-point approach. At this level, participating communities must have at least one paid Main Street staff member, a board of directors, and a consistent base of volunteers.²⁷⁹ Designated Communities receive priority status for training and grant funding, as well as free membership to the national Main Street network. With this elevated status, Designated Communities are expected to pursue Certified Main Street designation and serve as mentors in the Montana Main Street Mentorship program. This is an opportunity for experienced Main Street programs to provide guidance to Affiliate Communities. In this instance, a line of communication is established between often larger cities, such as Bozeman, and small towns like White Sulphur Springs.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Montana Main Street, "Montana Main Street Program Guidelines," *Montana Department of Commerce*, July 2015, 7.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁸⁰ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

The third and highest level, “Certified Main Street Program,” involves formal community recognition by the National Main Street Center. According to the Montana Main Street guidelines, “the Certified Main Street Community tier fully demonstrates a perfected Main Street Approach and boasts nationally recognized success with downtown revitalization organization and efforts.”²⁸¹ A Certified Main Street Community must meet the requirements prescribed for Designated Communities, as well meet the Standards of Performance required for National Main Street accreditation. Because of the organizational framework and consistency necessary, most Montana Main Street participants do not proceed to this level.²⁸²

Wisemiller described Thompson Falls, Montana, a Designated Community, as a comparable municipality to White Sulphur Springs, in terms of its history and economy (Figure 5.1). He also suggested that the successful Main Street strategies being utilized in Thompson Falls could be easily implemented in White Sulphur Springs. Regarding Thompson Falls, Wisemiller stated that “that you’ve got a community of about a thousand people in Western Montana that was very much extractive industry-based. Similar to White Sulphur Springs, in 1979 when the lumber mill closed, the population retracted by half its size, it had to rethink its position.”²⁸³

As a Montana Main Street participant, Thompson Falls has found ways to connect its historic built environment to its aesthetically beautiful natural environment. Wisemiller emphasized that bringing the two together required a long-term vision.

²⁸¹ Montana Main Street, “Montana Main Street Program Guidelines,” *Montana Department of Commerce*, July 2015, 8.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸³ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

Ultimately, Thompson Falls focused their attention of establishing a walkable core connecting their downtown to neighboring parks and other sites of interest, such as the farmers market. Not only does this trail system appeal outdoor-minded visitors, but makes these outlying areas more accessible for the town’s elderly and disadvantaged populations. After the community’s Main Street vision was in place, business owners in downtown Thompson Falls felt motivated to invest in their properties. Wisemiller offered the example of a former Boeing employee who owned a historic hotel in Thompson Falls. Without a structure in place, he was felt daunted by the task of renovating his building. Now that same individual “sees that renovating it isn’t just an economic opportunity for his business or his vision, it’s that missing puzzle piece that fits into that larger community vision and one that ties to heritage tourism which interests many different stakeholders and groups.”²⁸⁴

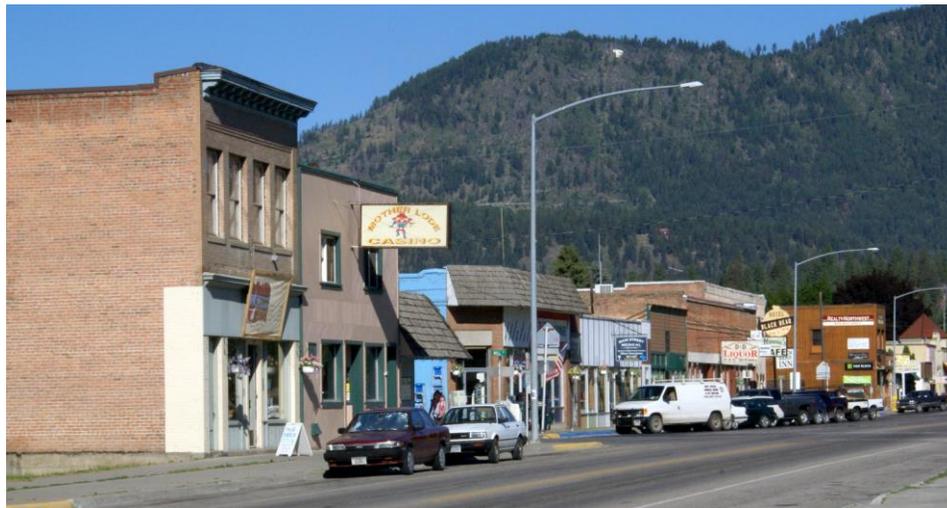


Figure 5.1: Downtown Thompson Falls, Montana. From the Greater Thompson Falls Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.thompsonfallschamber.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ThompsonFallsStreet.jpg>.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

Wisemiller acknowledged the challenges that rural Montana communities face when trying to participate in Main Street Montana. Although the program has been tailored to be successful in small towns, many still struggle with finding the necessary human and financial capacity to utilize the prescribed framework. In relation to White Sulphur Springs, Wisemiller explained that despite their interest in Main Street Montana, the community staff and volunteer resources. He stated that, “we’ve been working with them for five years, and part of their challenge with coming into the program is staff capacity. They’re a town where they say, ‘we’ve got so many irons in the fire, how can we take on something else?’ But we have ongoing conversations.”²⁸⁵

The owners Red Ants Pants, 2 Basset Brewery, and Twin Sisters Trading Company, all of whom are very active in community activities, echoed this challenge in their interviews. Regarding downtown revitalization in White Sulphur Springs, Alaina Gordon of Twin Sisters Trading Company explained that “we really want to move forward with this town. We believe in it, but we're so tapped out. Every single thing that we've been able to accomplish in the last couple of years has been through painstaking grant processes and loan processes.”²⁸⁶ Likewise, Kim Hamm of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce noted the lack of able-bodied young adult participants in community planning efforts:

We have a lack of volunteers, so we try to be very creative... We are doing more with less, and its actually working. We are trying to find a way to get those twenty and thirty-year-olds involved. It seems like they are enthusiastic at a meeting, and then we don't see them... I've already got twenty hours per week worth of stuff. So, that's a challenge. Small communities are losing families, so we have less people... we are 20% poverty rate here in Meagher

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Alaina Gordon (co-founder of Twin Sisters Trading Company) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

County, and so those people are working one, two, three jobs, home businesses. By the time they do their kids' school and maybe 4-H, or something, they're done.²⁸⁷

Wisemiller shared his thoughts on historic preservation in White Sulphur Springs and other similar communities in Montana. Wisemiller emphasized the need for local governments and community leaders to consider the long-term value of their built resources:

I work with so many communities, even communities of 300 people, where the grocery store owners retire, then there is no succession plan. Then, the grocery store is vacant, and the town now has a conversation "do we knock down the building, it's vacant, lets knock it down!" Or can we renovate it? Now, knocking down the building in a smaller town could be 40% of the downtown structures. So, this isn't just a conversation about historic preservation, this is a conversation about resiliency and existing in the changing demographics.²⁸⁸

Having spent much of his youth in White Sulphur Springs, Wisemiller is very familiar with its historic resources. Though he is excited White Sulphur Springs' recently completed public school, he mourns the loss of the town's historic elementary school that was demolished in the process:

I have yet to be back to the community since it has been down. Granted, 25 years ago when I first saw it, I thought it was an abandoned building. But I think that there could have been some potential to do something with it, and I feel like those are missed opportunities. But, it's not really my place, I mean, communities need to determine if that is the right thing and sometimes buildings need to come down. I know that there was earthquake damage that had been sitting there for 80 years and there as asbestos, but there are funds that can help with that. I am seeing other communities along that Highway 12 corridor look at reusing these schools. Now that building is down, White Sulphur Springs doesn't have a big historical building that is vacant.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁷ Kim Hamm (local photographer and Vice President of the Meagher County Chamber of Commerce) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²⁸⁸ Tash Wisemiller (Program Director of the Montana Main Street Program) in discussion with the author, December 2017.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

Going forward, White Sulphur Springs will need to be mindful of preserving its remaining historic commercial structures on Main Street. If White Sulphur Springs chooses to pursue Affiliate Community status, they will have access to technical assistance and grant funding that will help to plan for the reuse of structures such as the vacant Parberry Building, adored by Sarah Calhoun for its brick architecture and Levi's signage.

Wisemiller's discussion also confirms some of the underlying differences between Montana's Old West and New West ideologies. At the heart of it, however, both groups want the same vitality for their communities regarding historic preservation. With respect to encouraging community leaders to conserve their historic built environment, Wisemiller said that:

Sometimes I soft-stepped the words historic preservation. I am a firm believer that rural Montana communities and rural communities are so overlooked as fly-over communities that we, especially now in this climate, we misunderstand, and we don't give them enough credit. They are talking about the same things that the larger communities are, they just aren't using some of the loaded words. So, maybe we go to a community and they are less resigned to say sustainability, but they're saying, "we just want to use the buildings we have, they're the identity of our community, it just makes sense."²⁹⁰

Here Wisemiller suggests that the Montana Main Street program can be used as a means to bridge the gap between the sustainability ideals promoted by the state and the practical-mindedness of Montana's rural communities.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

Next Steps

Considering the many factors at play, Wisemiller is very optimistic about the future of White Sulphur Springs and the prospects of other rural communities in Montana. While serving as a Bradley Fellow with the Montana Historical Society during graduate school, Wisemiller was told that he was from White “Suffering” Springs:

I had never in my life heard White Suffering Springs, and it was insulting. So now I use that story. I say that, back in 2010, they referred to it as White Suffering Springs. Now, everywhere I drive across the state, tens and tens of thousands of miles of speaking to community leaders and the populations in these towns, I use that example of White Suffering Springs, and I never hear that. When I say that I am from White Sulphur, someone says “I go there for the hot springs, I go there for Red Ants Pants, what a cool town!” They get it.²⁹¹

White Sulphur Springs has come a long way from White “Suffering” Springs. A fundamental shift is hard to deny when considering the positive changes that have taken place there since 2010. Referencing the recent buzz surrounding White Sulphur Springs, Wisemiller stated that:

While discovered, it still feels undiscovered. So, people go to Red Ants Pants and then they come back, and they say “wow, I went to this restaurant, they had really good food, good beer, I’m going to go back and float the Smith, I’m going to go hunting there, I’m going to go back for the rodeo.” So I hear that more and more, and everywhere I go across the state.²⁹²

This work has demonstrated just a few of the many revitalizing activities currently taking place in White Sulphur Springs. Community leaders are posed with two seemingly disparate options for economic development: support the town’s long-

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

standing extractive-industry base through the proposed Black Butte Copper Project and switching gears to all-in tourism and service industry development. Wisemiller posits that the two are not mutually exclusive. He believes that the Montana Main Street program is “about realizing that a community can still have mid-size manufacturing, maybe even extractive industry, at the same time that they are moving in the direction of brick and mortar work in the downtown.”²⁹³ Seeking status as an Affiliate Community of the Montana Main Street program will help White Sulphur Springs to channel this vision.

²⁹³ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Montana, along with much of the greater Rocky Mountain West region, is at the epicenter of the ideological transition from the “Last Frontier” to the “Last Best Place.” The state’s scenic mountain-scapes and far-reaching prairies that once attracted hardy settlers in search of material riches are now home to diverse populations, industries, and cultural norms. Much has changed in our national economy since the West was settled during the mid-19th century, and these changes have affected rural communities differently based on their size, location, and ability to adapt. While the natural amenity-rich western half of Montana has flourished in recent years, remote communities in central and eastern Montana are still determining where they fit into the New West.

Through an analysis of the economic and community development activities occurring in White Sulphur Springs, a small town in Central Montana, this thesis has demonstrated the ways in which communities can adapt to changes in the economy through entrepreneurship, historic preservation, and leveraging local sense of place. Here, local businesses are balancing the past and present by taking advantage of new industry opportunities without losing sight of what makes White Sulphur Springs unique. By making use of their resources and identity, businesses, individuals, and local officials are, in a sense, marketing the town’s economic potential while highlighting its authentic Western character.

Chapter 1 provided an in-depth overview of the macro forces causing micro-level change in Mountain West communities. The aim of Chapter 1 was to provide a

regional context for the case study community by defining the rural West and identifying the challenges that rural areas face. The discussion also examined the ways in which the West, particularly the Mountain West, is quickly evolving. Since the 1970's, rural areas in targeted locations have experienced renewed population and economic growth. As opposed to relocating for a particular industry, as may have historically been the case, newcomers are choosing Rocky Mountain communities, either formerly or currently rural, for an amenity-driven lifestyle. Because much of the recent population growth in the Mountain West is associated with the availability of outdoor amenities and recreational opportunities, the debate over natural resources is at the forefront of planning conversations throughout the greater region and disproportionately impacts rural communities like White Sulphur Springs.

Chapter 2 introduced the case study community, White Sulphur Springs. The chapter began by identifying the location and geography of White Sulphur Springs and its surroundings. Next, a brief history of the community was presented, with special attention paid to its formerly robust extractive industries and colorful history of past tourism development efforts. The remainder of the chapter examined the characteristics of present-day White Sulphur Springs by examining local Census statistics and recently released Growth Policy Plans, the Montana equivalent to a comprehensive plan. In conclusion, three recent community projects were discussed: the construction of a new public school, installation of historic-period street lamps, and the Meagher County Art and Cultural Trail. Each of these endeavors underscores the tenacity and community-mindedness of White Sulphur Springs residents.

Chapter 3 sought to explore the highly controversial, socially-charged environmental conflict surrounding the proposed Black Butte Copper Project, a mining venture spearheaded by Sandfire Resources America, Inc. The chapter began with an analysis of literature pertaining to the history and consequences of mining in the Western United States, with a particular focus on cases in Montana. Next, a brief overview of Sandfire Resources America, Inc. and their plans for the Black Butte Copper Project was provided, followed by a discussion of the timeline of and contention surrounding the ongoing permitting process. The chapter concluded with an examination of Sandfire's intimate relationship with White Sulphur Springs and their vision for their shared future. Though questions regarding the long-term economic impact of mineral extraction in Meagher County remain to be answered, the ongoing debate highlights the complicated role of natural resource industries in the increasingly post-industrial Western United States.

Chapter 4 offered three alternative business models to traditional extractive industries, using the example of Red Ants Pants, 2 Basset Brewery, and Twin Sisters Trading Company, all based in downtown White Sulphur Springs. These businesses were chosen for their age, their emphasis on employing local materials and staff, and for the industries that they represent. All three provide value-added products that highlight White Sulphur Springs' sense of place. Specifically, this chapter drew upon and discussed the in-person interviews conducted with owners of these businesses. Interviewees were asked a set of standardized questions regarding their business practices and goals, followed by a set of questions about White Sulphur Springs, more generally.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 discussed the advantages of the Main Street program, at the national and state-level, and its relevance to promoting heritage-based economic development in Montana's small towns. The chapter opened with an examination of literature pertaining to economic development in small towns and rural areas. Next, the following sections provided an overview of the National Main Street Center and the Montana Main Street Program, elaborating on their similarities and differences. The section pertaining to the Montana Main Street Program included the personal and professional insight of Tash Wisemiller, Program Director of Montana Main Street and native of White Sulphur Springs. The final section discussed potential steps forward for White Sulphur Springs, if they intended to seek status as an Affiliate Community.

Omissions and Limitations

As prefaced in the introduction to this thesis, the scope of information gathered was influenced by several limitations. First, due to the remote location of White Sulphur Springs, the amount of time available for in-person data collection was constrained. A week-long site visit was conducted in December of 2017, at which time interviews with local business owners and government officials were carried out. Second, prior to the start of this investigation, very little scholarly research existed for White Sulphur Springs and the surrounding area. This lack of material was remedied by recent municipal and county publications, local history texts, and in-person conversations.

The issues at the heart of this thesis are multi-faceted and complex. Several hundred more pages could be written on the history of settlement and development in the Western United States and the difficult challenges that present-day rural communities face. This thesis offers the case of one community, White Sulphur Springs, that conveniently illustrates this narrative, but by no means represents every small town in the Mountain West, let alone Montana. Likewise, White Sulphur Springs has its own unique story, one that involves the likes mine barons, circus performers, railroad tycoons, and famed authors, that cannot be explained by the general history of the region.

Closing Thoughts

In-person research pertaining to White Sulphur Springs revealed several positive, qualitative characteristics that are worth considering. First, White Sulphur Springs is not just a city, but a community. Through interviews and personal discussions, it was apparent that everyone in White Sulphur Springs is connected in some manner, by way of business, family, or friendship. Because of this, everyone has personal stake in the future of the town and collective decisions can occur at the grassroots level. Because of the small size of the community, those decisions have a large, lasting impact.

Second, extractive industries often never completely disappear from rural economies. The local support for Sandfire Resources America, Inc., which is largely staffed by White Sulphur Springs natives, has demonstrated the community's desire for profitable natural-resource extraction and a certain weariness towards service-

based industries such as tourism. These concerns are not unfounded, but White Sulphur Springs should, in addition, consider longer-term business models that make use of their heritage resources. Though Sandfire's staff may be members of the community, their legal responsibility is to the company's shareholders.

Third, the actions of an individual can motivate the masses to make proactive changes. Though she emphasizes that White Sulphur Springs' recent upswing has been community effort, the impact that Sarah Calhoun and Red Ants Pants have had on the town cannot be underestimated.

Future Research

Meagher County and White Sulphur Springs should examine and quantify the effects of the recent activities that have been discussed in this work. First, a survey of local business owners should be carried out regarding changes to their seasonal profits since the Red Ants Pants Festival first began. Have sales increased? If so, by how much and during which months of the year? Second, a market study should be conducted on Red Ants Pants attendees. The purpose of the study would be two-fold: identify the types of individuals who are attending the music festival and to determine the number and frequency of festival-goers who return to White Sulphur Springs throughout the year. These investigations would provide valuable information pertaining to the long-term economic impact of the annual event and may prove useful for other rural communities considering similar cultural programming.

Looking beyond Red Ants Pants, the community should examine the activities that bring visitors to White Sulphur Springs throughout the year. Fishing, hunting, and

local history have been identified by locals as reasons why out-of-towners come to the area. A study should be conducted to ascertain what specific features tourists find attractive. These aspects of White Sulphur Springs' environment and culture should be highlighted in marketing the community and developing future business models.

Community development organizations, statewide universities, and the Montana Main Street Program offer the expertise and resources for such investigations. Specifically, Montana Main Street staff can provide assistance with needs assessments and long-range planning in the form of webinars, in-person workshops, and networking between participant communities.

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