

GROWTH POLICY

PHILLIPS COUNTY, MONTANA



Adopted May 2023

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PHILLIPS COUNTY MISSION STATEMENT

Provide quality public service to protect and enhance the well-being of the people within the county and provide citizens with integrity and fiscal accountability.

To accomplish the mission statement, there are a series of Goals and Policies within this document.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

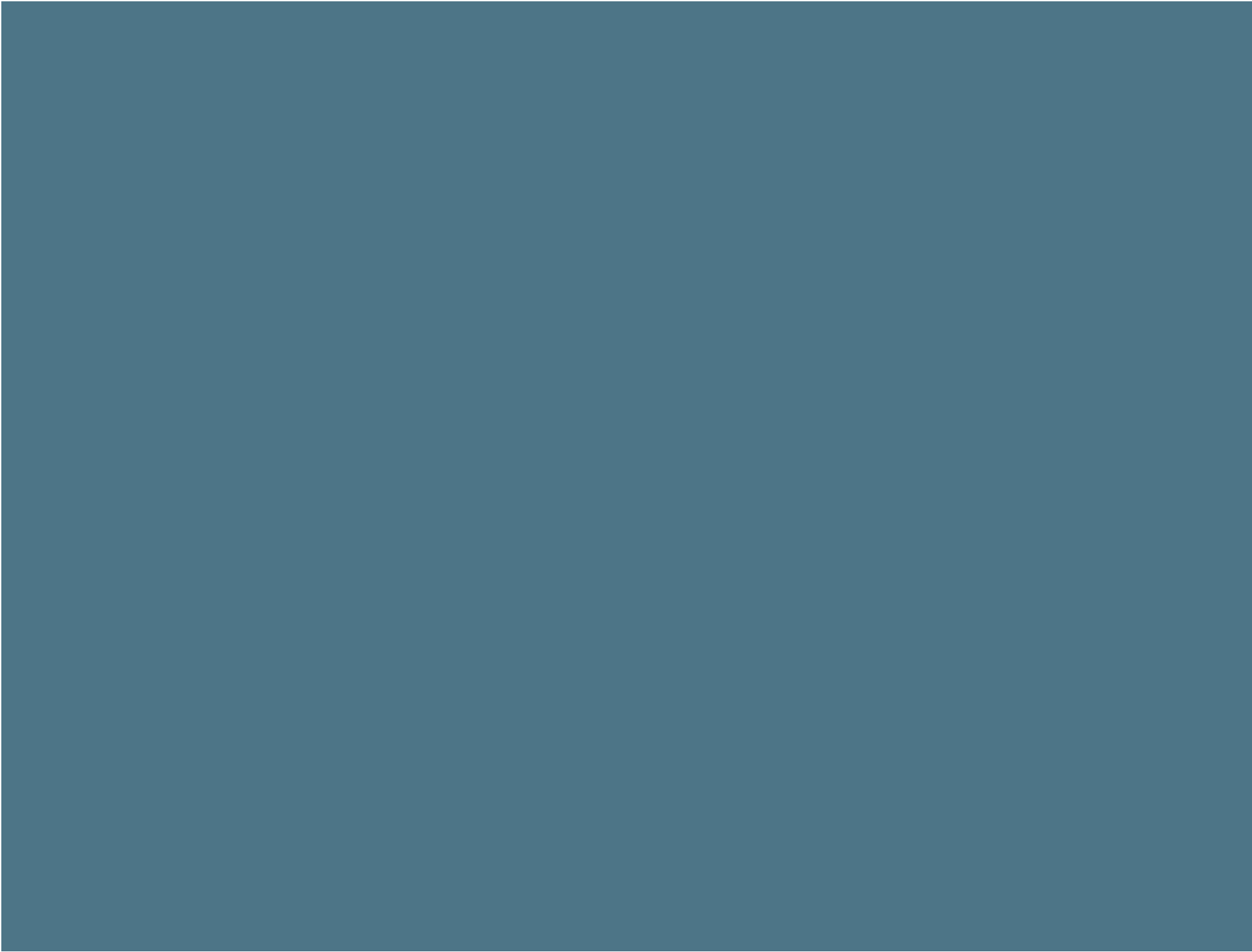
Over the past few years, demographic and economic patterns have begun to shift in communities across Montana. In response, the leaders of Phillips County have decided to update the county's Growth Policy, the comprehensive document intended to support ordinances, establish investment and regulation priorities, and prompt subsequent plans and studies for the county.

Last updated in 2017, this iteration of the Phillips County Growth Policy document uses elements of the former plan that remain relevant, yet it is essentially a brand-new document. The term "Growth Policy" and "Comprehensive Plan" are synonymous in Montana; according to state statute, municipal documents adopted to serve the purpose this plan fulfills are known as "growth policies".

This Phillips County Growth Policy will consider and include the towns of Dodson, Saco, Zortman, Whitewater, and Loring in its summaries, datasets, and recommendations. However, the plans set forth in this document do not address the City of Malta, which has adopted its own independent City Growth Policy.

The goals and policies herein are broad and are meant to be for the time frame of 2022 to 2027. Planning is organic by nature and growth policies should be updated every five years to stay relevant. Goals from the 2013-2017 Growth Policy that are still relevant, such as providing affordable housing, supporting PhillCo Economic Growth Council to promote economic development in the County, and updating public facilities are addressed as required by the MCA. This updated Growth Policy identifies both these and other needs for the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Phillips County is located in north central Montana. It is bordered to the west by Blaine County, to the south by Fergus, Petroleum, and Garfield Counties, and to the east by Valley County. To the north, across the US-Canada border, lies Saskatchewan, Canada. The area has a history of homesteaders, outlaws, ranchers, cowboys, Native Americans, and even dinosaurs.

The area is open and contains agriculture, wildlife areas, and access to the Missouri River. The area is known for its hunting and fishing opportunities as well as two museums that house dinosaur exhibits.

The communities of Malta, Saco, Landusky, Loring, Whitewater, Zortman, and Dodson make up much of the population. The remaining residents live in surrounding rural areas.

Nearly all services needed by the 4,000 people that call Phillips County home are located in Malta, including the hospital, senior center, grocery, and public library.

THE GROWTH POLICY

Phillips County has been proactive in planning for its future. A growth policy consolidates the community's ambitions and ideas, laying out a "road map" for future decisions pertaining to development and services. The growth policy will also help decision makers now and into the future establish the priorities, goals, and implementation strategies with which the community can fulfill the vision of the growth policy. This growth policy update expands upon the 2013-2017 document and in accordance with MCA 76-1-601.

WHAT IS A GROWTH POLICY?

A growth policy details the community's vision for future development and provides the tools to achieve long-range planning objectives. Counties and cities in Montana are enabled by state statute MCA 76-1-601 to develop and implement a growth policy. Growth policies are legal documents that form the basis for policy decisions, but they are not themselves regulatory. The term "growth policy" is exclusive to the State of Montana, but the utilization of a comprehensive planning document to guide community actions is a standard practice in cities and counties across the United States.

WHY IS PHILLIPS COUNTY WRITING A GROWTH POLICY?

Phillips County is writing a growth policy to ensure future growth in the county is sustainable, resilient, and reflective of the local public vision. The Phillips County Growth Policy provides guidance on how to grow jobs and protect heritage industries, as well as how to tackle community issues such as senior care and housing (including the abandoned senior care building), job loss, and other challenges.

HOW WAS THE GROWTH POLICY WRITTEN?

With funding from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, Phillips County contracted with Interstate Engineering, a civil engineering and planning firm that specializes in rural development, to lead the county through the process of updating its growth policy. The planning process augments community engagement, stakeholder interviews, and socio-economic and historical research to produce a comprehensive set of goals and policies for the county to utilize for community development. Growth policies are typically updated every five years, but they can also look as far ahead as 20 years into the future.

HOW TO USE A GROWTH POLICY

This document lays the foundation for community action and enables county agencies to develop programs, initiatives, regulations, and other items to achieve community goals. A growth policy is not a to-do list or an instruction manual, but rather a living document that grows with the county, as demonstrated by the typical five-year update cycle. Growth policies are also vital when pursuing community development projects because funding sources often require the project to be justified by a community plan like a growth policy.

The purpose of this growth policy is to inventory and analyze the opportunities for Phillips County. Montana State statutes demonstrate that a growth policy is the foundation for any regulations that may be adopted concerning land use in the community. Because citizen participation is a large factor in the goals and visions of a growth policy, it helps the community have a common focus for the future. Phillips County and its communities have a history of planning. Below is a list of planning activities from the past ten years:

- 2012 – Phillips County Land Use Resource
- 2013 – Phillips County Growth Policy
- 2016 – City of Malta Capital Improvements Plan
- 2017 – Phillips County Floodplain Ordinance
- 2020 – City of Malta architectural report on Highline Retirement Center
- 2022 – Public input: 91 survey responses – See Appendix B.

Montana Code Annotation (MCA) 76-1-605 declares that a growth policy is not a regulatory document, and a governing body cannot deny or impose land use approval based solely on the growth policy.

ADOPTING A GROWTH POLICY – MCA 76-1-601:604

Step 1: Montana Code Annotation (MCA) 76-1-602 states that a public hearing must have a public hearing and that notice be published at least 10 prior to the date set for the hearing in a newspaper “of general circulation in the jurisdictional area a notice of the time and place of the hearing.”

Step 2: Adoption by the Planning Board. The Planning Board, at the noticed public hearing, will recommend that the Growth Policy be adopted or not be adopted. If adopted, then, continue to Step 3.

Step 3: The Board of County Commissioners “shall adopt a resolution of intention to adopt, adopt with revisions, or reject the proposed growth policy” (MCA 76-1-604).

Phillips County Montana



0 15 30 45 Miles

CHAPTER 1

LAND USE

Historically, the area that is now Phillips County was home to the Blackfeet, Assiniboine, and Gros Ventre peoples. These nations lived largely nomadic lives, moving and adapting with the fluctuating availability of bison, gathered crops, and other natural resources.

European-American settlers brought livestock to the area in the 1880's, establishing the foundation for an industry that is still crucially important for the county. Phillips County is rural and sparsely populated: fewer than one person per square mile lives in the county today. An oft-cited fun statistic refers to the fact that there are more cows than people in Phillips County! According to prairiepopulist.org, there were 19 cows for each person in Phillips County in 2017.

Phillips County is located in north central Montana, bordered on the west by Blaine County, to the southwest by Fergus County, to the south by Petroleum County, to the southeast by Garfield County, to the east by Valley County, and to the north by the Canadian province Saskatchewan. The Fort Belknap Indian Reservation occupies the extreme western portion of the county.

According to the Montana State University (MSU, 2017), over 58% of the land in Phillips County is classified as farmland. Cattle comprises 64% of land designated agriculture, and grain production accounts for another 24%. The remainder of the farmland is used for other crops, such as hay and other non-cattle livestock. In 2017, there was \$74 million of farm revenue and \$23 million of net farm cash income for Phillips County agriculturalists.

The 2020 Natural Resource Conservation Service's Multi-Field Office's Phillips County Long-Range Plan states:

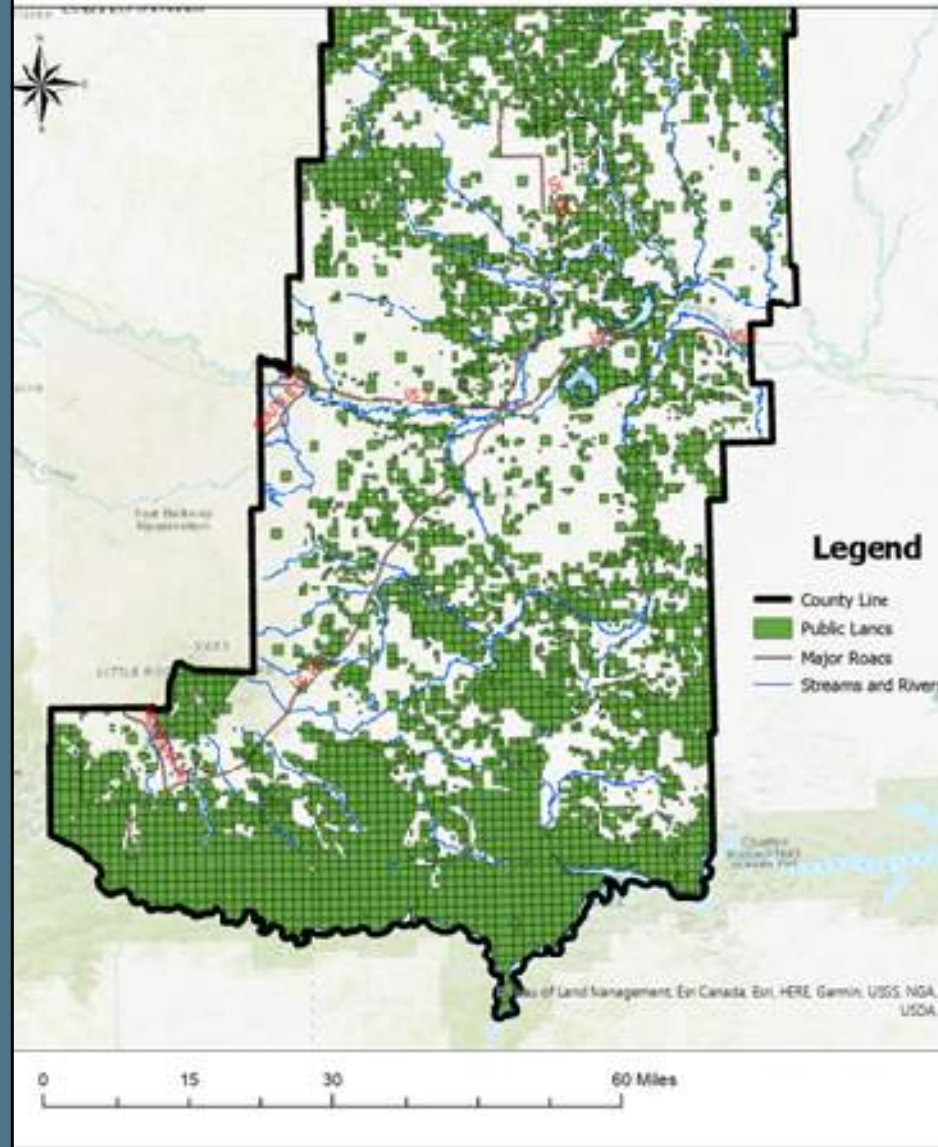
"The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service Census of Agriculture defines 'farm' as any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold, or normally would have been sold, during the census year. The term is used to include all crop and livestock operations. There are 445 farms in Phillips County on over 1.94 million acres with 79% that are operated by a family or an individual. Average farm size is 4,352 acres; about fifty-four percent of the farms are one thousand acres or more. In calendar year 2017, 285 farms harvested crops on just over 265,000 thousand acres (NASS, 2017)".

Private landowners hold approximately 48% of the county, while federal and state lands comprise 47% of the land. The remaining 5% is Fort Belknap tribal lands (4%) and local government lands (1%).

Conservation easements are a means for many landowners to save their land in perpetuity and to possibly receive a purchase price and tax benefits. "Simply put: A conservation easement helps the farm and ranch land stay farm and ranch land" (montanalandtrusts.org). Landowners often use conservation easements to plan their estate for their families and the future of their property.

In the 2012 Phillips County Land Resource Use Plan, there are goals and policies surrounding private property rights and agricultural uses. They have been incorporated in the land use goals, policies and projected trends section of this growth policy.

Phillips County Public Lands



LAND USE GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROJECTED TRENDS

GOAL 1

Maintain land use and development policies that balance the many needs and interests of residents and maintain the qualities of rural life without removing agriculture and grazing lands from production for current and future generations (Retained from 2017 Growth Policy).

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Update Subdivision Regulations as necessary.
Policy 2	Encourage development in areas which will not conflict with productive agriculture and grazing lands
Policy 3	Promote land development in and around incorporated areas that can provide services and discourage inefficient land use patterns that make it difficult to provide public services.
Policy 4	Encourage Rural Improvement Districts (RID) or Rural Special Improvement Districts (RSID) as an appropriate method of funding the increased demand for services in rural settings
Policy 5	Discourage development on areas of excessive slope, those prone to flooding or detrimental to natural resources.

GOAL 2

Protect agricultural land and promote the continuation of agricultural pursuits. (Adapted from the 2012 Phillips County Land Resource Use plan).

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Protect private property rights for all property owners in Phillips County.
Policy 2	Ensure open market conditions.
Policy 3	Encourage the retention of full unencumbered private property rights for all property owners in Phillips County.
Policy 4	Conserve, enhance and encourage ranching, farming and all manner of agricultural activities and operations in the county where appropriate.
Policy 5	Minimize potential conflicts between agriculture and non-agriculture users of land.
Policy 6	Educate new rural residents and longtime agricultural operators alike to their rights, responsibilities, and obligations relating to agricultural activities.
Policy 7	Integrate planning efforts to provide for the retention of traditional and important agricultural lands in agricultural production, as well as the opportunity for reasonable residential and other development.

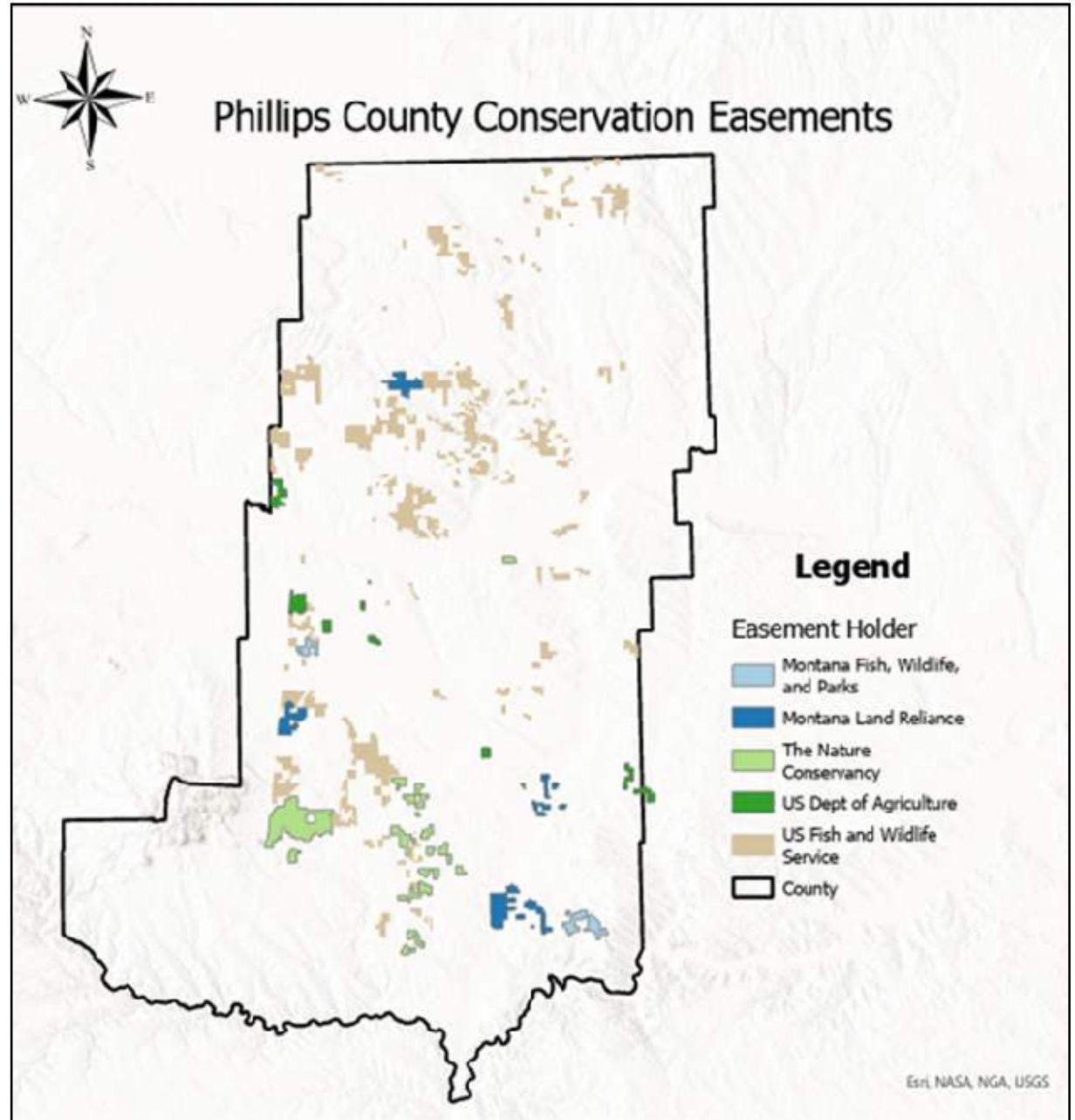
GOAL 3

Encourage participation in meaningful coordination between Phillips County and federal and state land management agencies.

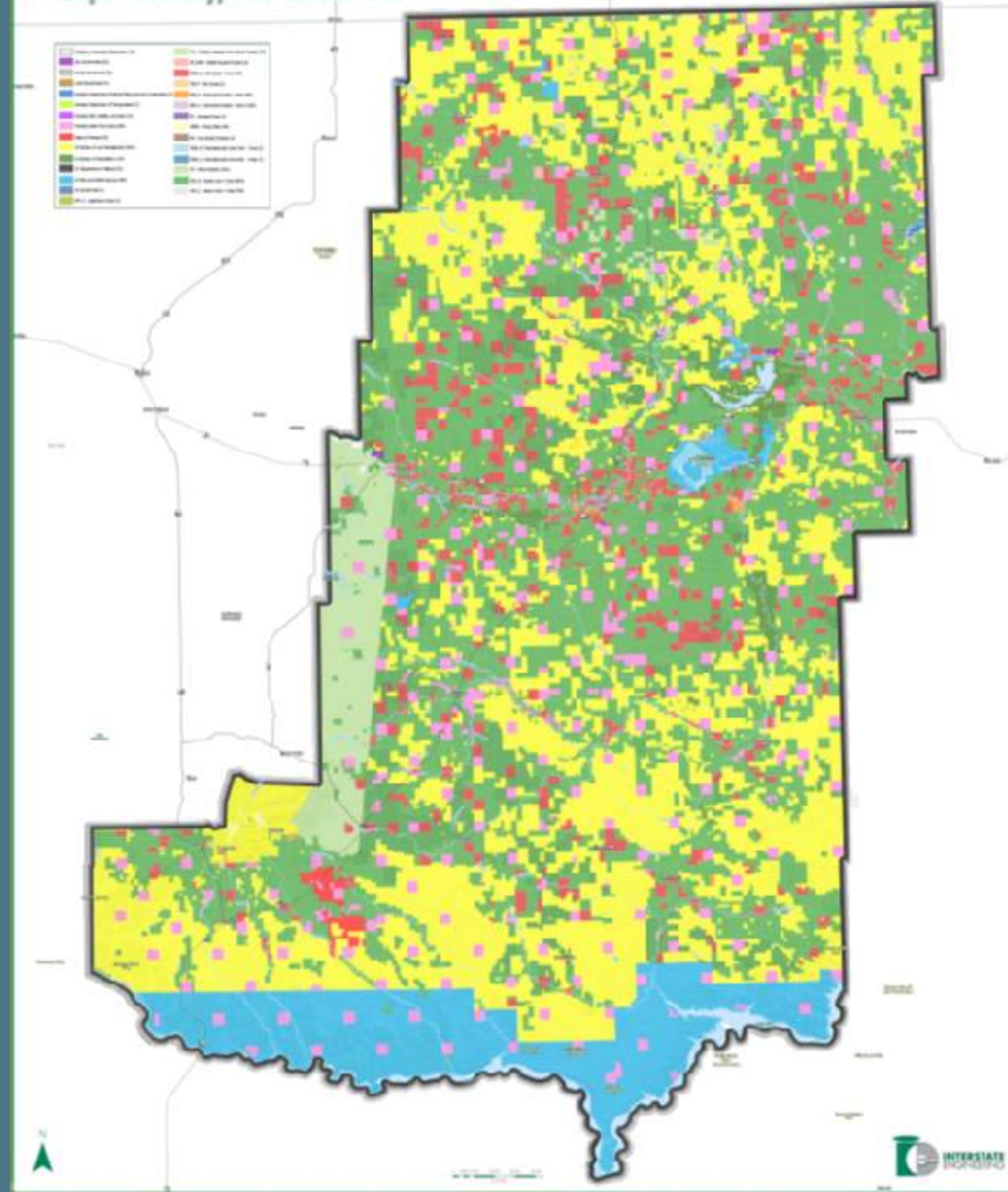
POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Encourage compliance with federal and state statutes.
Policy 2	Encourage county actions to preserve, support, and increase the county tax base.
Policy 3	Develop and encourage programs to enhance the effectiveness of local government in the state and federal land planning process for grazing.

PROJECTED TRENDS

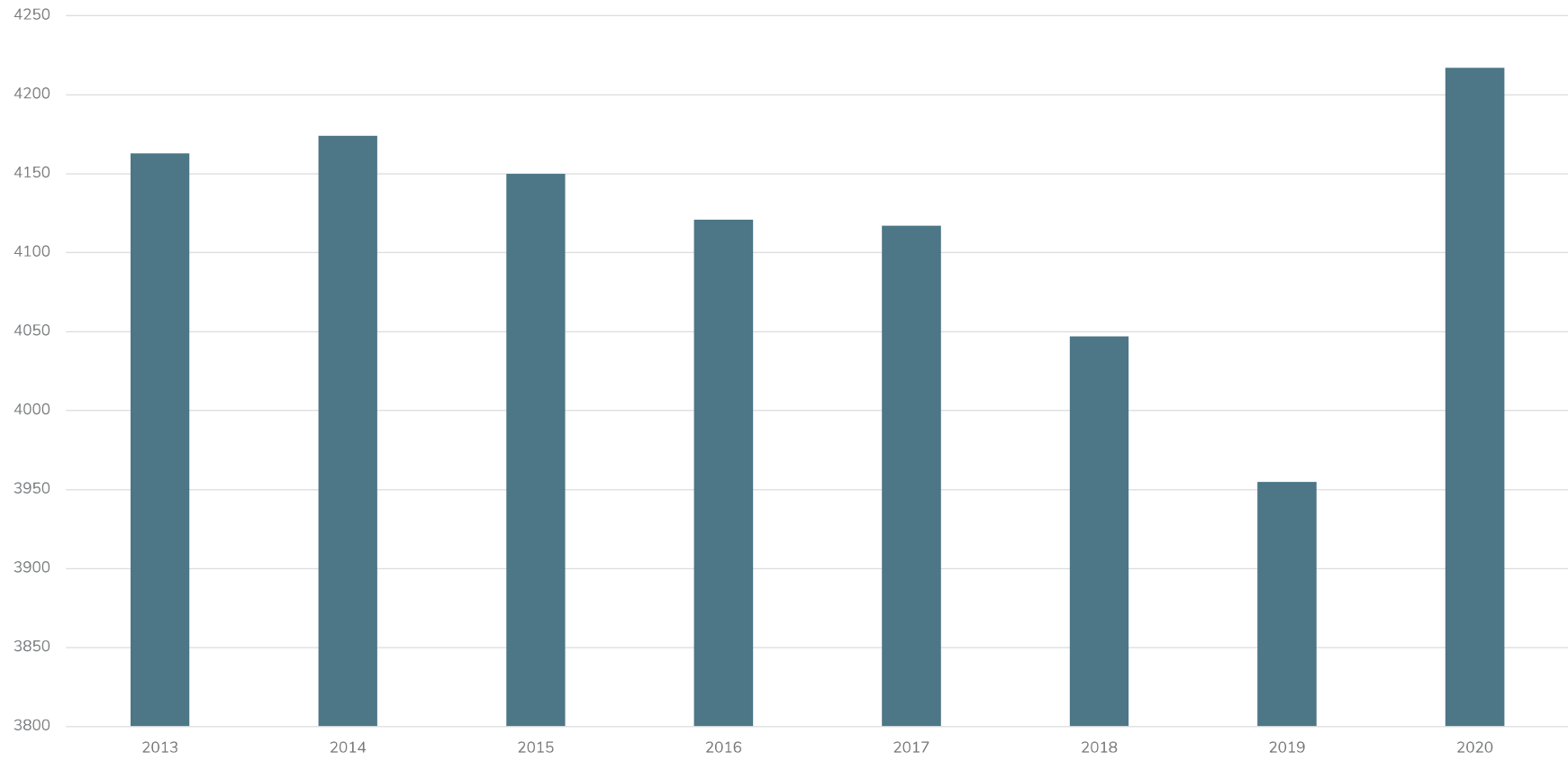
Phillips County land use is partially constrained by government owned property in the county. Like elsewhere in the state, ranches may be broken into smaller parcels over time.



Phillips County, MT Land Use



Phillips County Population



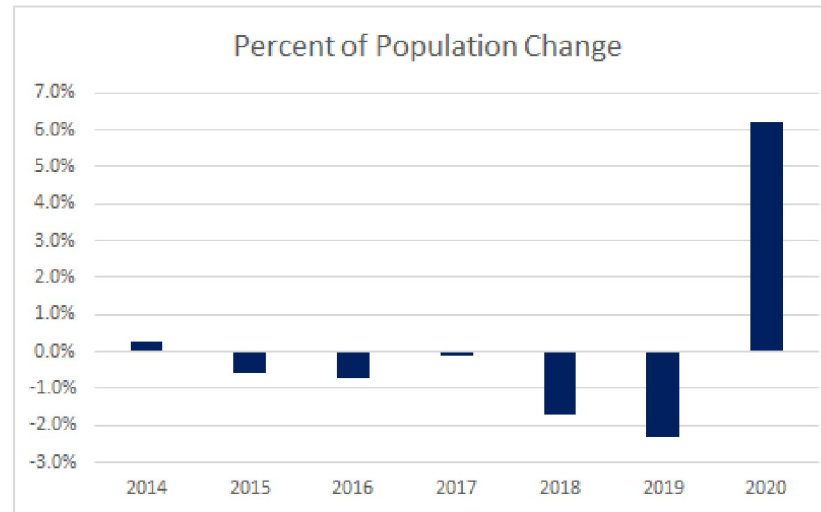
US Census

CHAPTER 2

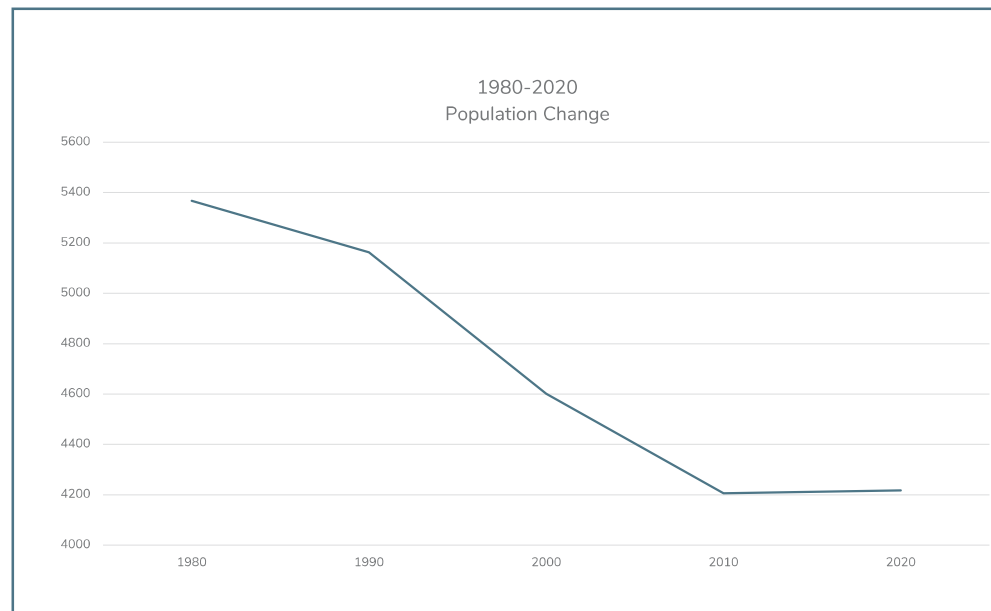
POPULATION

The population of Phillips County has remained relatively steady between 2014 (4,174 residents) and 2020 (4,217 residents). Census estimates from 2014 to 2019 indicate a decline in population; however, in 2020, the population rose 6.2%, according to the US Census.

To the right and on the following pages, there are three charts demonstrating recent population change, percent of recent population change, and longer-term change.

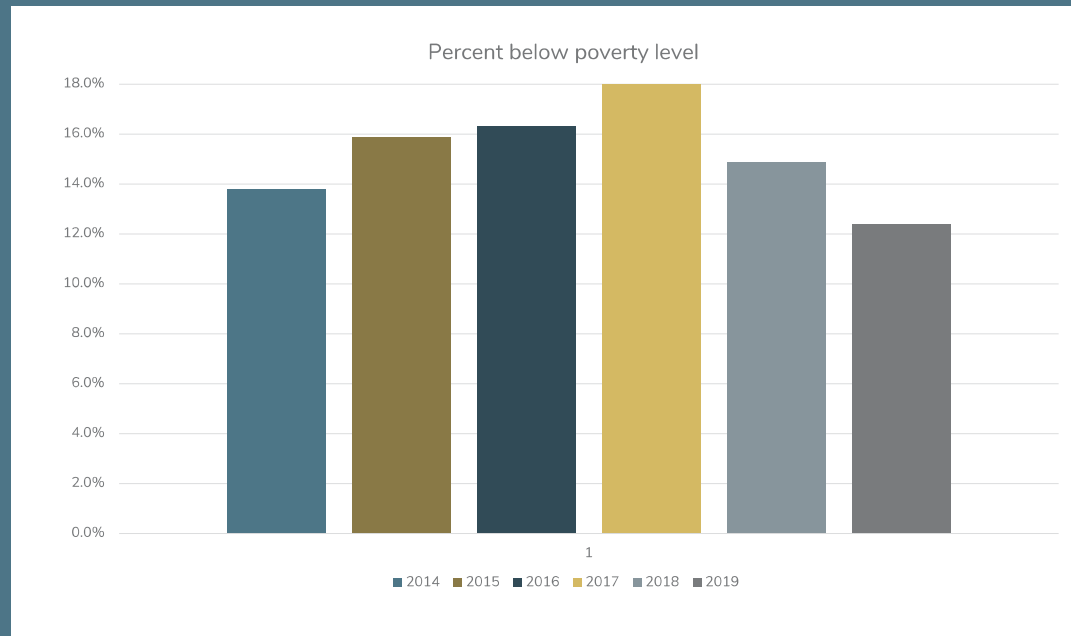


US Census



A large portion of the population of Phillips County (76.6%) is older than 18 and younger than 65. This indicates that the population is not “aging out”, a phenomenon occurring in many other rural parts of Montana. There are many young people and young families in the county, a positive indicator of future social and economic opportunity. For those residents that hope to age in place, efforts can be made to assist with that. Follow this link to planning.org for an article titled “Age-Friendly Rural Planning” for more information.

In Montana, the Median Household Income rose 0.8% from 2014 to 2018, while in Phillips County the median household income increased 16.8% in the same time frame (ceic.mt.gov). Poverty estimates show that Montana poverty went down 0.2% between 2014 and 2019. In Phillips County it also went down from 13.8% of people below the poverty level to 12.4%, a decrease of 1.4%.



TOWNS & CITIES

Malta, Dodson and Saco are incorporated, while Landusky, Loring and East Malta Colonies, Whitewater and Zortman are “census designated places.”



MALTA

Founded in 1909 and randomly named “by spinning the globe and pointing to the Island of Malta”, the population is 2,058 (census.gov).



DODSON

Population 128



LANDUSKY CDP

Population 22
according to census.gov

LORING COLONY

EAST MALTA COLONY

WHITEWATER CDP

Population 112

SACO

Population 279

ZORTMAN CDP

Population 33

POPULATION GOALS

GOAL 1

Maintain or slightly grow the population of Phillips County..

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Attract young families to the area by creating areas for entrepreneurial, value-adding businesses.
Policy 2	Encourage housing, employment, education, and recreation to attract and support new families in the county.

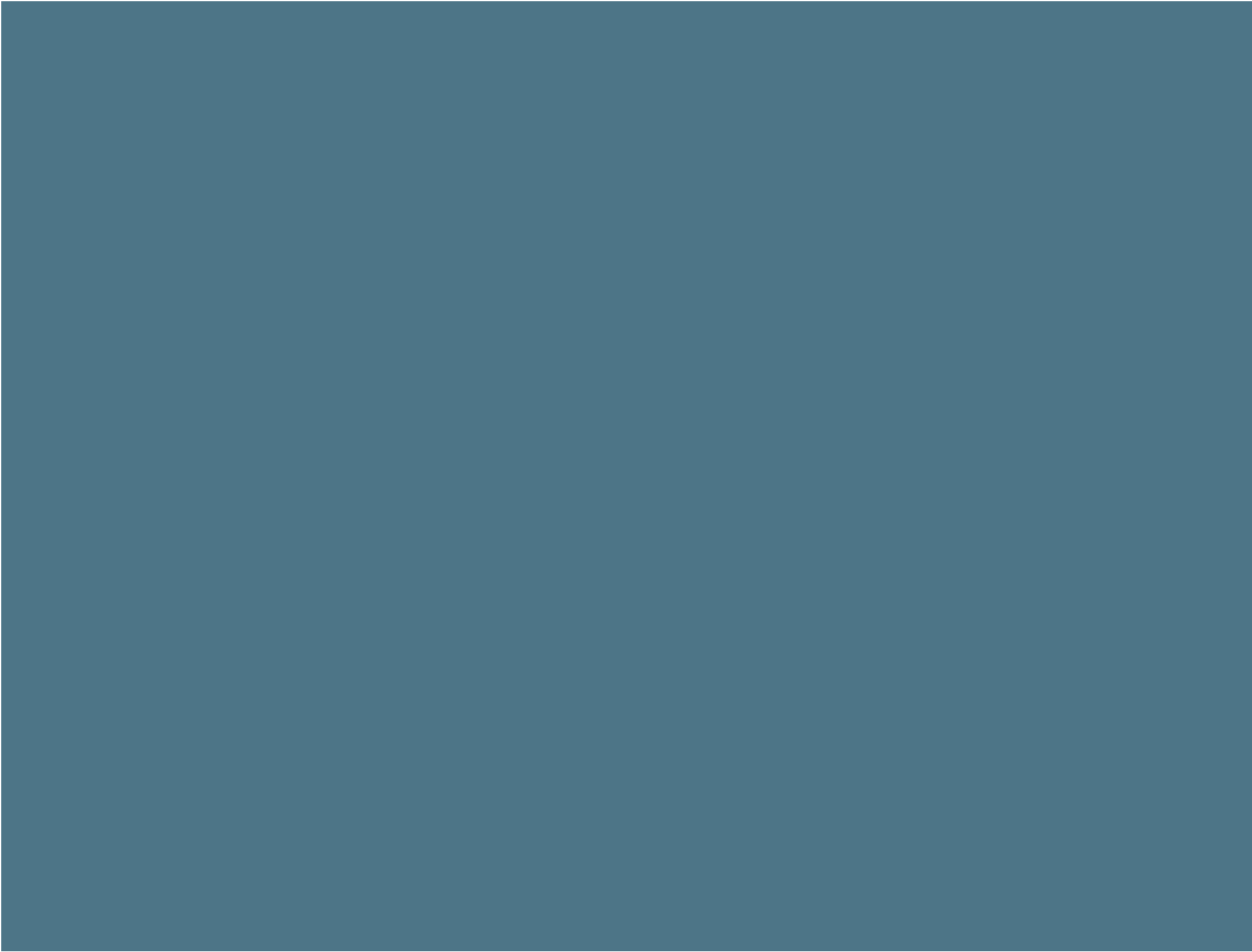
GOAL 2

Assist older population to age in place by keeping assisted living and retirement community facilities funded, maintained, and upgraded.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support grant funding and explore options housing of an aging population.
Policy 2	Respect the culture and history of Phillips County residents.

PROJECTED TRENDS

The trend statewide during the COVID-19 pandemic was growth as people moved into Montana from other states. Phillips County may continue to grow and projected trends from the Montana Census and Economic Information Center show Phillips County growing at a much faster rate than Montana as a whole: approximately 6% per year from 2014-2020 (ceic.mt.gov). However, these projections may change if the COVID trends do not continue in the future.

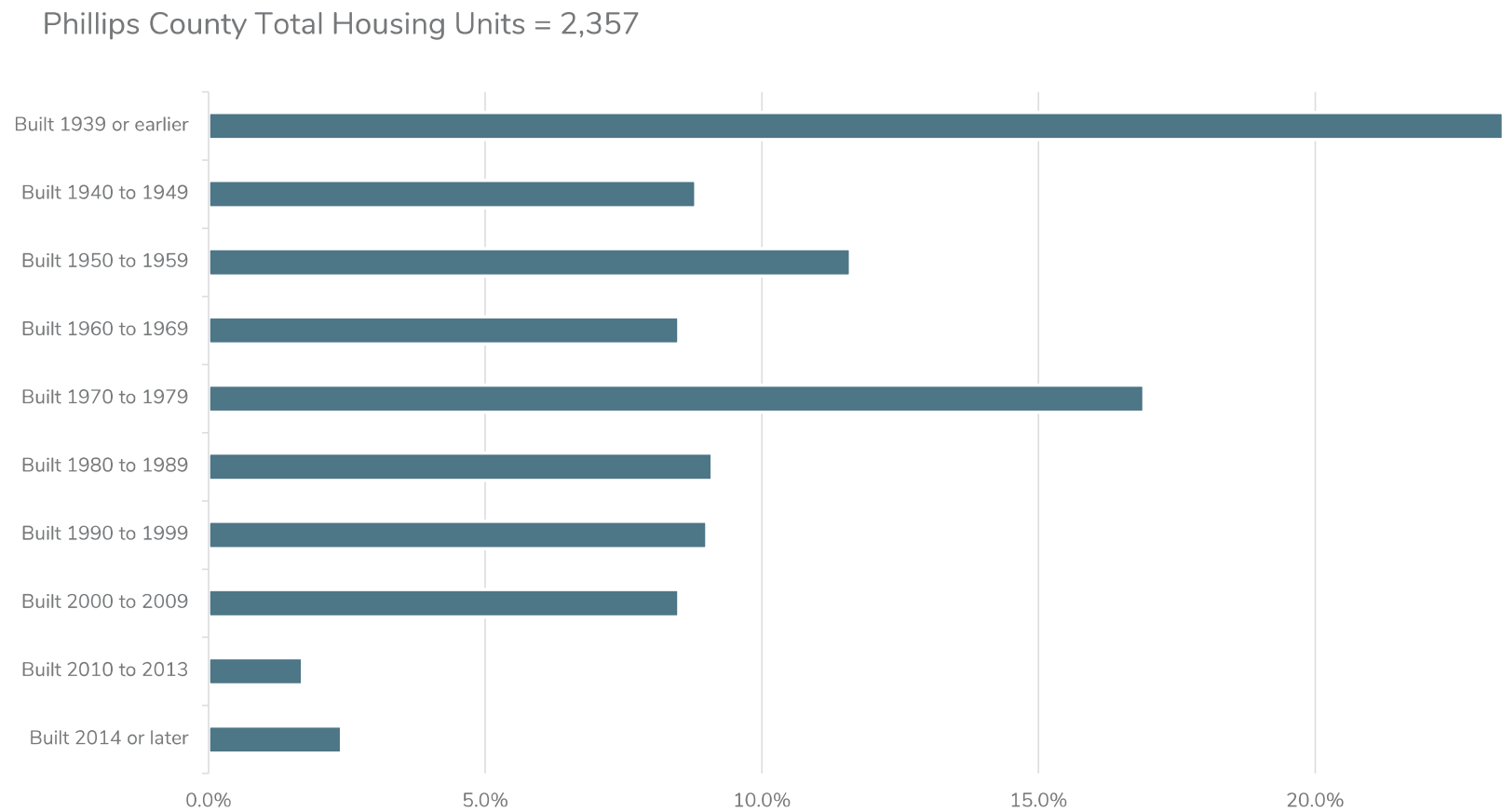


CHAPTER 3

HOUSING NEEDS

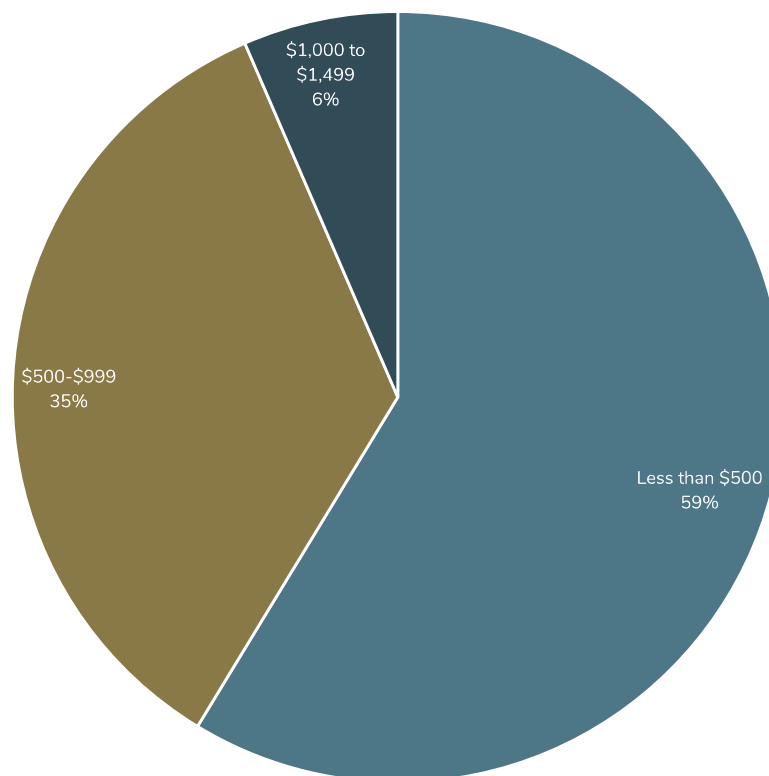
Home ownership is higher in Phillips County at 79.9% than the Montana average of 79.4%. According to the 2020 American Community Survey five-year estimate profile, there are 2,229 housing units in Phillips County. Of these, 1,770 are occupied and 459 are vacant. Demographics show that 3.5% of the residents in Phillips County moved into the area in 2019 or later. The majority of homes in the county are valued between \$150,000 and \$300,000; however, the county's housing inventory continues to age.

The chart below shows when housing was built according to the 2020 US Census:



According to the 2022 US Census, most long-term housing rentals cost under \$600/month, making Phillips County an affordable place to live.

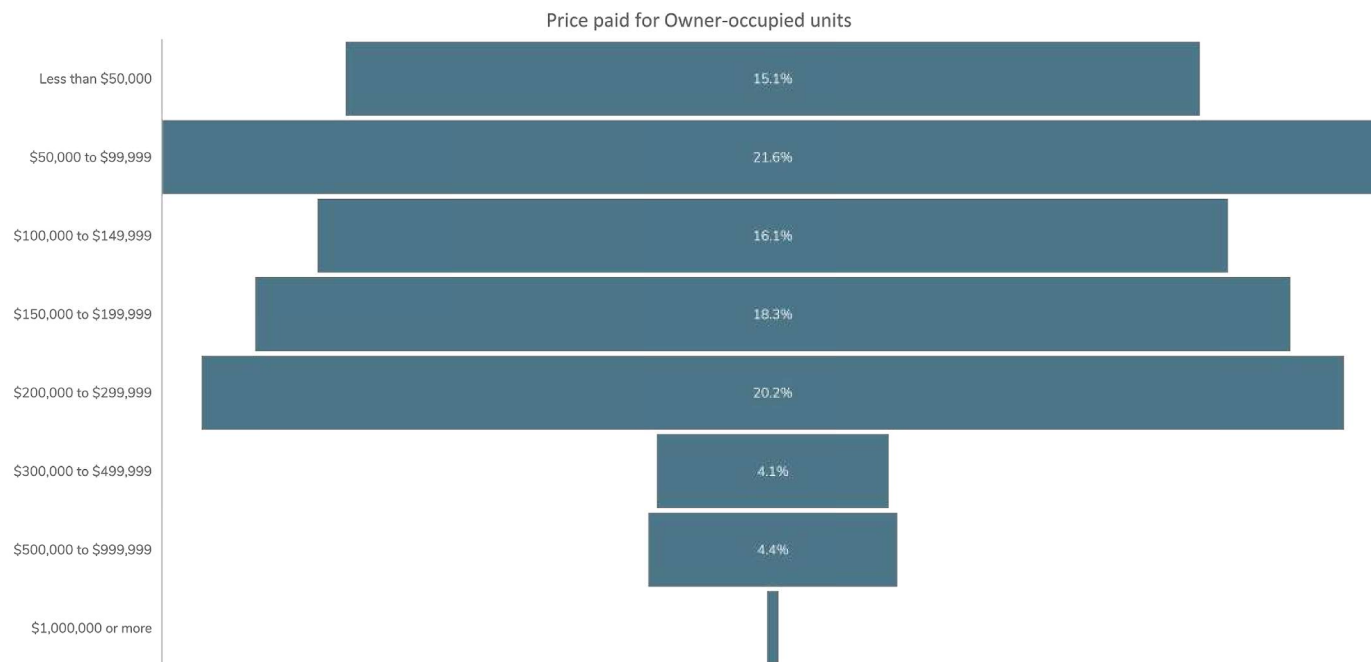
Units Paying Rent



The recent increases in housing costs are impacting all communities, including Phillips County. Allowing and encouraging smaller homes on smaller lots and different forms of housing are two strategies communities are using to facilitate and encourage “missing middle” housing. Missing middle housing is a term used to refer to homes that are no longer a part of typical urban development patterns, such as duplexes, triplexes, apartment courts, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs). Missing middle housing occupies a space in the housing market not fulfilled by detached single-family dwellings or large-scale apartment developments, providing residents with a greater variety of housing options to suit their needs.

Missing middle housing’s price range typically reflects its name, providing moderately affordable options for home buyers and renters. Additional information about the “missing middle” can be found by clicking this link: [Missing Middle](#).

The chart below depicts the price paid for an owner-occupied home.



HOUSING GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROJECTED TREND

GOAL 1

Continue to keep Phillips County affordable so residents can remain in place through all stages of life.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Encourage smaller homes and lot sizes more aligned with existing household sizes and incomes

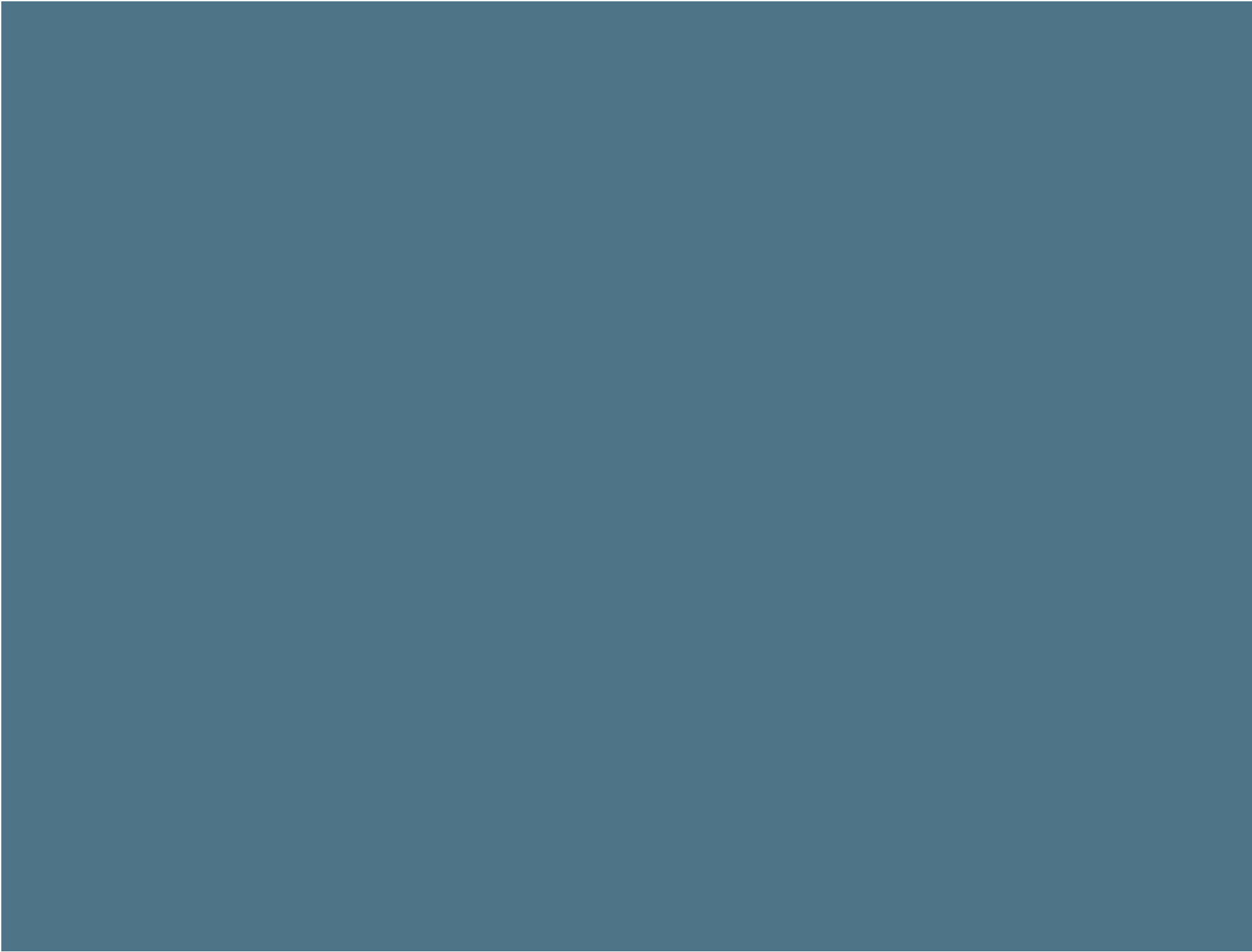
GOAL 2

Cooperate with the incorporated towns to rehabilitate old housing stock as it becomes available.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support grant applications that support planning and housing rehabilitation efforts

PROJECTED TRENDS

Phillips County will continue to be an attractive, affordable place to live. As the population continues to grow, new housing will be built. Many communities are adopting smaller lot sizes to encourage smaller homes that are more economical and easier to upkeep as one ages.



CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

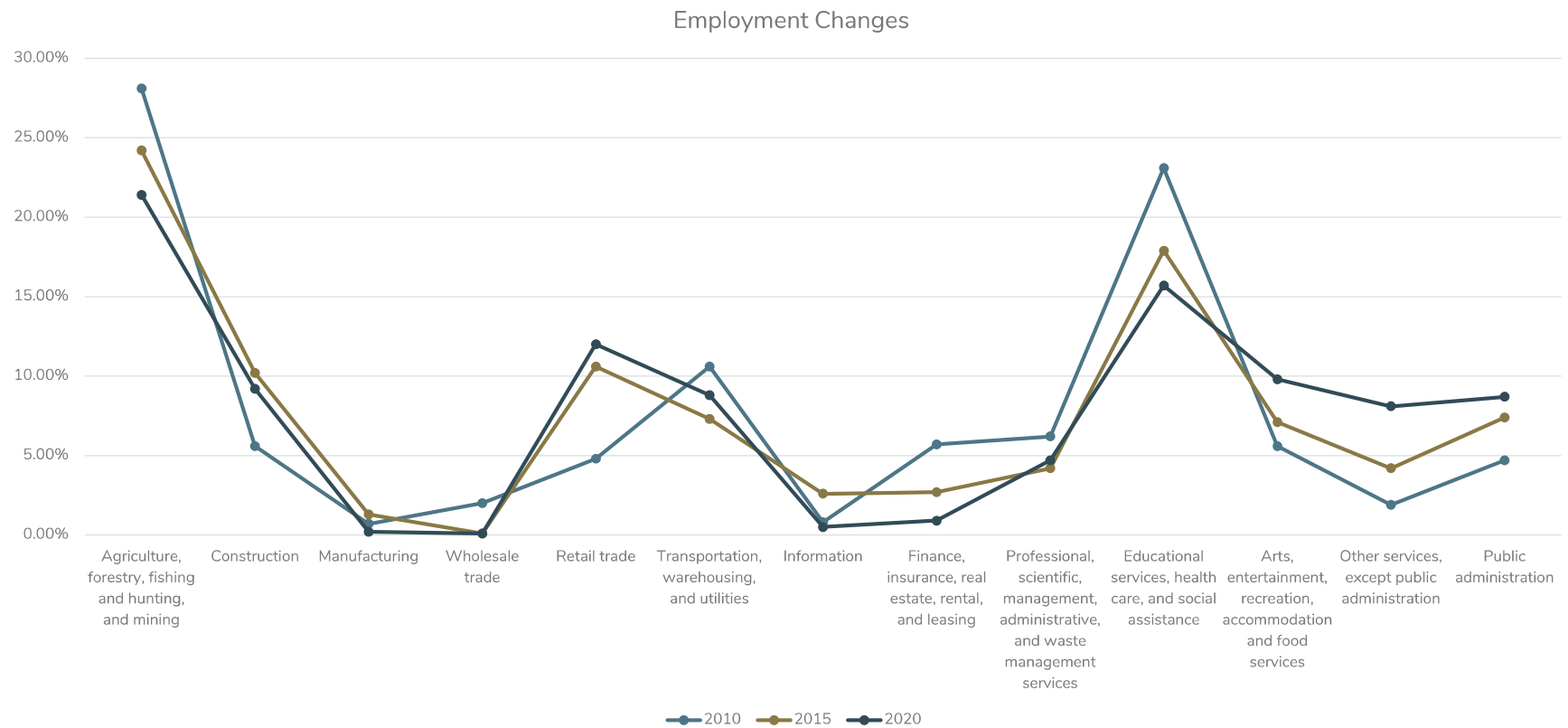
Phillips County has seen 6.7% growth in 2020, according to the US Census Bureau. Most residents are employed in the Agriculture, Forestry (not active), Fishing and Hunting, and Mining (not active) sectors (21.4%), followed by Educational Services and Health Care and Social Assistance (15.7%). These two sectors comprise 37.1% of the employed population. 62.9% of the remaining employed population are employed in Construction, Retail, Arts, Professional Services, and other sectors.

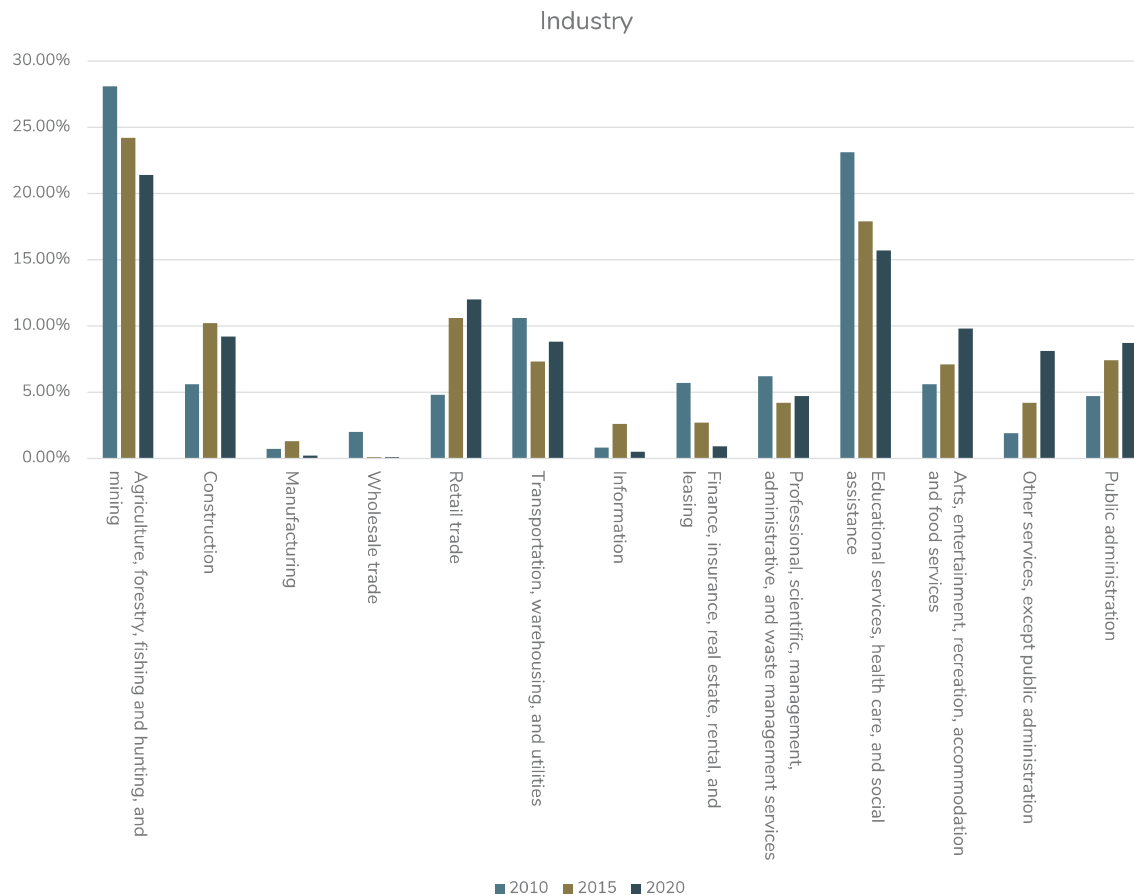
As demonstrated in these charts, industry has changed since the adoption of the 2017 Growth Policy. There are more service positions and fewer Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting, Tourism, and Mining positions. Generally, this is a shift to sectors with lower paying jobs.

INDUSTRY

as classified by Census.gov

	2010	2015	2020
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	28.10%	24.20%	21.40%
Construction	5.60%	10.20%	9.20%
Manufacturing	0.70%	1.30%	0.20%
Wholesale trade	2.00%	0.10%	0.10%
Retail trade	4.80%	10.60%	12.00%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	10.60%	7.30%	8.80%
Information	0.80%	2.60%	0.50%
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	5.70%	2.70%	0.90%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	6.20%	4.20%	4.70%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	23.10%	17.90%	15.70%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	5.60%	7.10%	9.80%
Other services, except public administration	1.90%	4.20%	8.10%
Public administration	4.70%	7.40%	8.70%





In the 2012 Phillips County resources land use plan, recreation is emphasized as business viability.

“Local businesses depend seasonally on the influx of visitors to the federal and state lands. Phillips county will consider review and comment upon all draft plans and environmental impact statements affecting land and land use in Phillips County.”

Goals and policies from this plan are included in the following section.

ECONOMIC GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROJECTED TRENDS

GOAL 1

Keep the Phillips County hunting, fishing, and outfitting economies strong and viable.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider marketing Phillips County hunting and fishing opportunities inside and outside of Montana.
Policy 2	Support associations and groups that support the hunting and fishing.

GOAL 2

Expand and grow basic industry and businesses in the county to include manufacturing and processing.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider creating and maintaining a Phillips County website.
Policy 2	Promote the Malta Business and Industry Development District (MBIDD). (See MBIDD FEASIBILITY STUDY document).
Policy 3	Continue to support PhillCo Economic Growth Council and the mission of that organization.
Policy 4	Support businesses that bring value-added products to the local agricultural industry and offer technical assistance through PhillCo Economic Growth Council when necessary.

GOAL 3

Maintain the benefit from agriculture, fishing and hunting and natural resource extraction by supporting those that practice these activities.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Maintain flexibility of land use options by focusing on mitigating any negative impacts of new development.

GOAL 4

Promote value-added agricultural businesses, especially in the MBIDD.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider ways to encourage new businesses to locate in the MBIDD area. See MBIDD Feasibility Study.

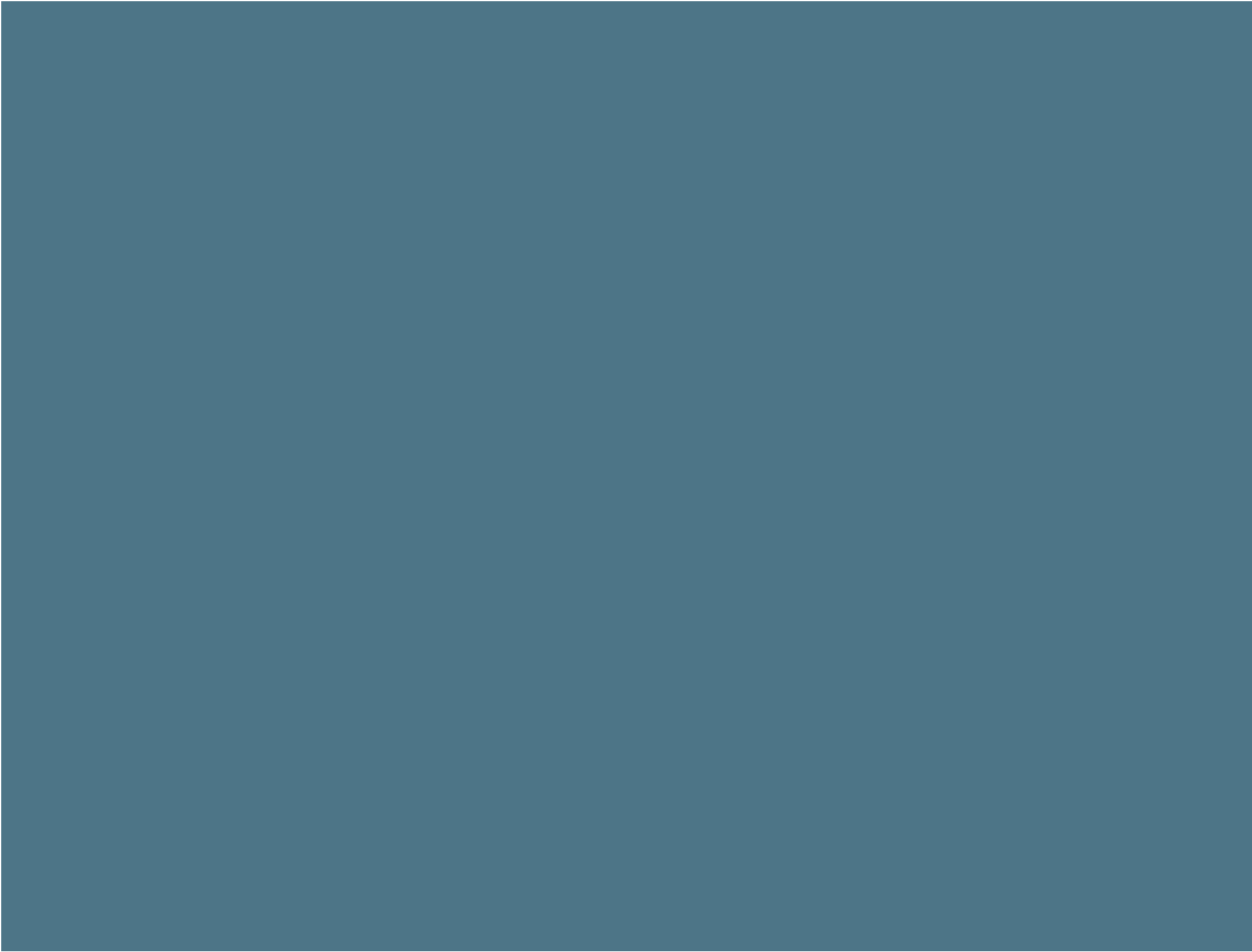
GOAL 5

Encourage a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities in Phillips County.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Provide opportunities for primitive recreational activities, non-motorized and motorized uses, camping, and horseback riding uses.
Policy 2	Encourage recreational activities that enhance and encourage opportunities for economic development in Phillips County.
Policy 3	Encourage recreational activities on the lands in Phillips County that increase the capacity for federal and state land resources to provide more economic return to the county.
Policy 4	Continue to seek out and expand upon cooperative efforts with interested user groups.

PROJECTED TREND

Many entrepreneurial services are going into specialty local products such as breweries, bakeries, and local agricultural products. Phillips County is a natural place for this kind of growth considering the volume and variety of agricultural products produced in the community. Hunting and outfitting bring valuable revenue to Phillips County businesses, as well.



CHAPTER 5

LOCAL SERVICES

Local services are vital for the health, safety and welfare of a community. Phillips County provides law enforcement, emergency services, education, telecommunications, limited public transportation, postal services, and healthcare.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Phillips County has a Board of Commissioners comprised of three people from around the county. There are three commission districts. (See Appendix A). Commission terms are six years based on MCA 7-4-2105.

Sheriff Department

The Phillips County Sheriff's Department currently has seven officers (including the Sheriff), as well as two reserve officers. The Disaster Emergency Services Coordinator's office is also at the Sheriff's Department's office.



FIRE SERVICES

The Phillips County Rural Volunteer Fire Department, Saco Volunteer Fire Department, Malta Volunteer Fire Department, the Fort Belknap Fire Management, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) fire services cover Phillips County. The BLM Zortman Station is staffed with a Fire Operations Specialist, two Type 6 engines, and one Type 4 engine. Type 6 trucks are used for initial attack, are like pickup trucks, and carry 150-400 gallons of water, while Type 4 trucks are larger, capable of carrying at least 750 gallons of water. The state-wide “Mutual Aid and Common Frequencies Manual 2021” guides communications in a mutual aid event.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE

Emergency medical services are provided by the Phillips County Ambulance Service. The county currently has four ambulances.

OPEN BORDER PATROL WITH CANADA.

According to US Customs and Border Protection, “Morgan (MT) is a Permit Port, which means that importations of cargo must be approved in advance by the Area Port of Sweetgrass” (cbp.gov). However, the address for the port of entry is Loring, 16 miles south of Morgan.

This border crossing is open Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM. These limited hours have curtailed weekend visitors to Phillips County from the Canadian provinces. The Phillips County Motorsports track has lost Canadian racers that would have participated. Unfortunately, the limited hours require many Canadians to travel on Friday, a day earlier than necessary for a Saturday race, and incur additional travel expenses.

EDUCATION

Phillips County has elementary, middle, and high schools in four districts, plus two colony schools. The communities of Dodson, Malta, Saco and Whitewater all have K-12 schools.

There are no post high school education institutions in Phillips County. However, there are 11 different community colleges and four-year colleges within 200 miles.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Phone and internet services are provided by Triangle Communications, T-Mobile Home Internet, Viasat Satellite provider, HughesNet satellite provider and Spectrum Cable. With the satellite options, virtually all of Phillips County can access high speed internet services so long as they have a clear sight line to the satellites.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Phillips Transit Authority operates a demand response system, which means a call is necessary in advance to schedule a ride. The Amtrak Empire Builder passenger train line, which operates between Chicago and Seattle/Portland, stops in Malta. There is no public transportation outside of Malta.

POSTAL SERVICE

There are six post offices throughout Phillips County. The more rural stations have limited hours. There are UPS and FedEx drop off locations in Malta.

HEALTH CARE

The Phillips County Hospital is a small critical access facility with six beds that provides care including some specialized services. There is also a County Health Department with a County Nurse. Unfortunately, the Hi-line Retirement Center was closed in 2022.

LOCAL SERVICES GOALS, POLICIES AND PROJECTED TRENDS

GOAL 1

Preserve and protect the peace and dignity of the people of Phillips County; Protect the rights and privileges of the citizens established under the Montana Constitution and the Constitution of the United States.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Develop interagency cooperative agreements to ensure full cooperation of federal and state law enforcement agencies with the Phillips County Sheriff.

GOAL 2

Keep Phillips County safe from crime and illegal activities..

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Find creative ways to fund services with grants and low interest loans to not burden resident taxpayers.
Policy 2	Support the Sheriff's Department to recruit and maintain a strong department.

GOAL 3

Continue to provide fire services for the needs of the county..

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Find creative ways to fund services with grants and low interest loans to not burden resident taxpayers.

GOAL 4

Continue to work with state, tribal, and federal agencies with mutual aid agreements.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Maintain communication by conducting annual meetings in the spring prior to fire season.

GOAL 5

Support the school system to provide quality education.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider the needs for future school building sites when needed.

GOAL 6

Support high speed Internet in the County.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support co-location of services where appropriate.
Policy 2	Consider adding standardized regulations to the subdivision regulations for co-location.

GOAL 7

Continue supporting public transportation in Phillips County.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Provide letters of support as appropriate for Phillips Transit Authority and Amtrak Empire Builder.

GOAL 8

Support postal and delivery services..

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider postal services as an appropriate use in the MBIDD.

GOAL 9

Maintain access to health care.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Provide letters of support as appropriate to Phillips County Hospital.
Policy 2	Support the Phillips County Health Department.

PROJECTED TRENDS

As the county’s population increases, volunteer services, such as the fire departments, will be challenged. “Based on past, present, and future projections, Phillips County’s greatest risk over the next 30 years is from wildfire” (riskfactor.com). As wildfires continue to occur at an increasing rate, Phillips County can be a leader in cooperative Fire and Emergency Management.

Phillips County appears to have adequate high-speed internet and schools. There are limited but available public transit options, both local and national. The trend here is to support continuance of these services.



CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC FACILITIES

WATER

Phillips County has a variety of water system types. The City of Malta provides a municipal water system to 1,800 residents, while the Phillips County Zortman WSD serves 169, Phillips County Green Meadows WSD serves 45 through the City of Malta (Phillips County Growth Policy 2013-2017), Camp Creek Water Users Association serves 50, Dodson Water serves 120, East Malta Colony serves 47, Loring Hutterian Brethren Inc. serves 45 and Saco serves 180. The remainder of County residents use individual wells.

WASTEWATER

The incorporated entities in Phillips County have permitted wastewater systems including Malta, Dodson, and Saco. Whitewater has a wastewater district. The remainder of the County is served by individual wastewater systems, i.e., septic tanks.

SOLID WASTE

Phillips County has a county wide refuse district with collection sites throughout the county. The City of Malta landfill operates the solid waste service.

ROADS

Roads in Phillips County vary in surface and jurisdiction. U.S. Highway 2 is the county's primary east-west atrium, while U.S. Highway 191 is the most significant north-south highway. Currently, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) has plans for construction on US 191 south of Malta: according to the MDT website, the project is necessary "to update the existing vertical and horizontal alignment and provide a highway that needs current design standards" (mdt.mt.gov).

MDT has planned to conduct these additional projects in Phillips County:

- US Route 2 upgrading with chip seal, rumble strips and new painting, 2020 completed.
- Highway 243 overlay project north of Saco, 2022.
- Highway 191 landslide cleanup near milepost 115, 2022.
- Highway 191 reconstruction in Phillips County between milepost 147 and 156, 2023.
- Dodson South Canal bridge, scheduled 2024.

According to the County's 2017 Growth Policy, there are more than 1,500 miles of gravel and unpaved roads in Phillips County. The Commissioners and Road Foreman decide on maintenance in the three districts. The county determines infrastructure maintenance obligation priorities in an informal manner, addressing concerns on a case-by-case basis. Though it is an increasingly common and popular tool for such decisions, Phillips County has not adopted a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) that county leadership could use to guide investment decisions. This tool is useful for sustaining and maintaining publicly funded infrastructure, and it creates a system of accountability for county leadership by expressly stating investment priorities.

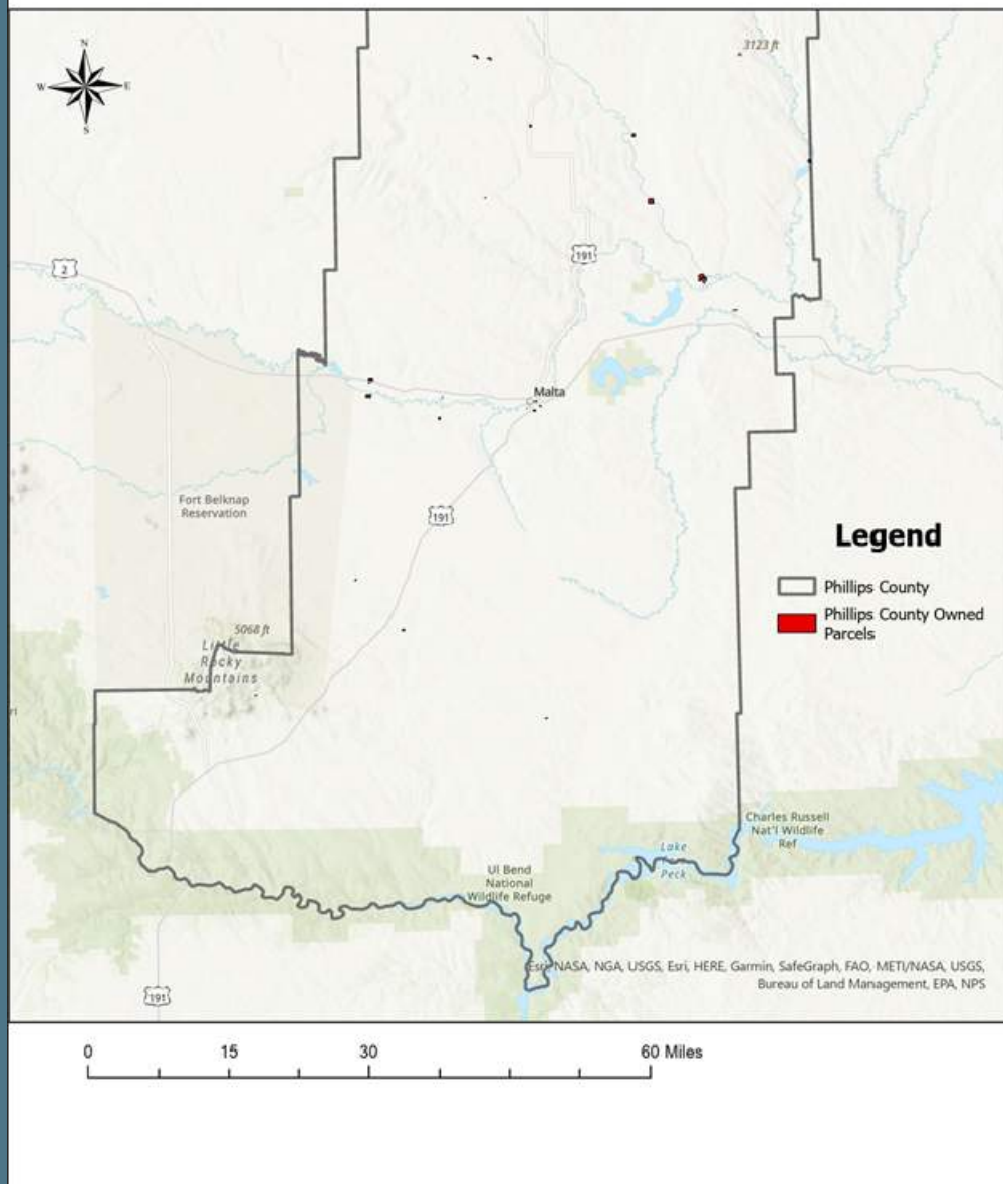
LIBRARY SYSTEM

The main branch of the Phillips County library is in Malta with other branches in Dodson and Saco. According to librarytechnology.org, the Phillips County library system has a collection of more than 23,000 books and an annual circulation of almost 18,000.

COUNTY OWNED PROPERTIES AND BUILDINGS

Phillips County owns 52 parcels throughout the county according to Montana Cadastral records. Buildings include the County Courthouse, Robinson House and Antique Modes of Transportation at the Phillips County Museum, the County Library, the Old Clinic, the county shops (Malta, Dodson, Saco, Whitewater and Loring), the Milk River Pavilion, the Dodson Library and the fairgrounds.

County Owned Property



PUBLIC FACILITIES GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROJECTED TRENDS

GOAL 1

Improve, protect, and maintain drinking water resources in Phillips County.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support land uses that do not threaten drinking water sources.
Policy 2	Identify wellhead protection areas for public wells.

GOAL 2

Safe and individual wastewater treatment.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	During subdivision review, recommend septic system placement away from sensitive soils or topography.

GOAL 3

Continue to maintain countrywide collection sites.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Research funding for continued solid waste disposal management.

GOAL 4

Maintain a schedule of road upgrades.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Consider a County Capital Improvements Plan which prioritizes the use of grant funding whenever possible.
Policy 2	Research funding opportunities for road upgrades as needed.
Policy 3	Complete a road inventory, in coordination with federal and state agencies, which will include, but is not limited to, a database, maps, GIS locations and photographs.

GOAL 5

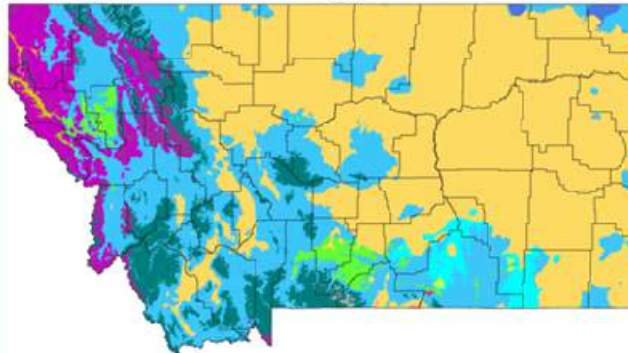
Continue supporting the County Library System.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support library efforts to stay current with technology that better serves county residents.
Policy 2	Research grants and other funding to support the library system.

PROJECTED TRENDS

Public services will be strained as the population grows. The county will need to ensure continued funding for critical public service resources and amenities. Rural water and wastewater systems will continue to be primary means of service for the rural areas. As there is a lot of land, private water and wastewater should not become a burden to the county.

Köppen Climate Types of Montana



Köppen Climate Type

BSk (Cold desert)	Dsc (Dry-summer subarctic)
BSk (Cold semi-arid)	Dwb (Warm-summer humid continental)
Csb (Warm-summer mediterranean)	Dfa (Hot-summer humid continental)
Cfa (Humid subtropical)	Dfb (Warm-summer humid continental)
Cfb (Oceanic)	Dfe (Subarctic)
Dsb (Warm-summer mediterranean continental)	ET (Tundra)

Data sources: 1991-2020 climate normals from PRISM Climate Group, Oregon State University, <https://prism.oregonstate.edu>; Outline map from US Census Bureau

CHAPTER 7

NATURAL RESOURCES

Phillips County is an area of wide spaces and large agricultural operations. There is a small mountain range in the southwest portion of the county (the Little Rocky Mountains). The rest is flat range land with small buttes.

CLIMATE

Phillips County is considered semi-arid with warm summers and cold winters (weather-us.com). On the map below entitled Köppen Climate Types (Köppen was a German botanist of the early 20th century), Phillips County shows as a cold, semi-arid climate.

GEOLOGY

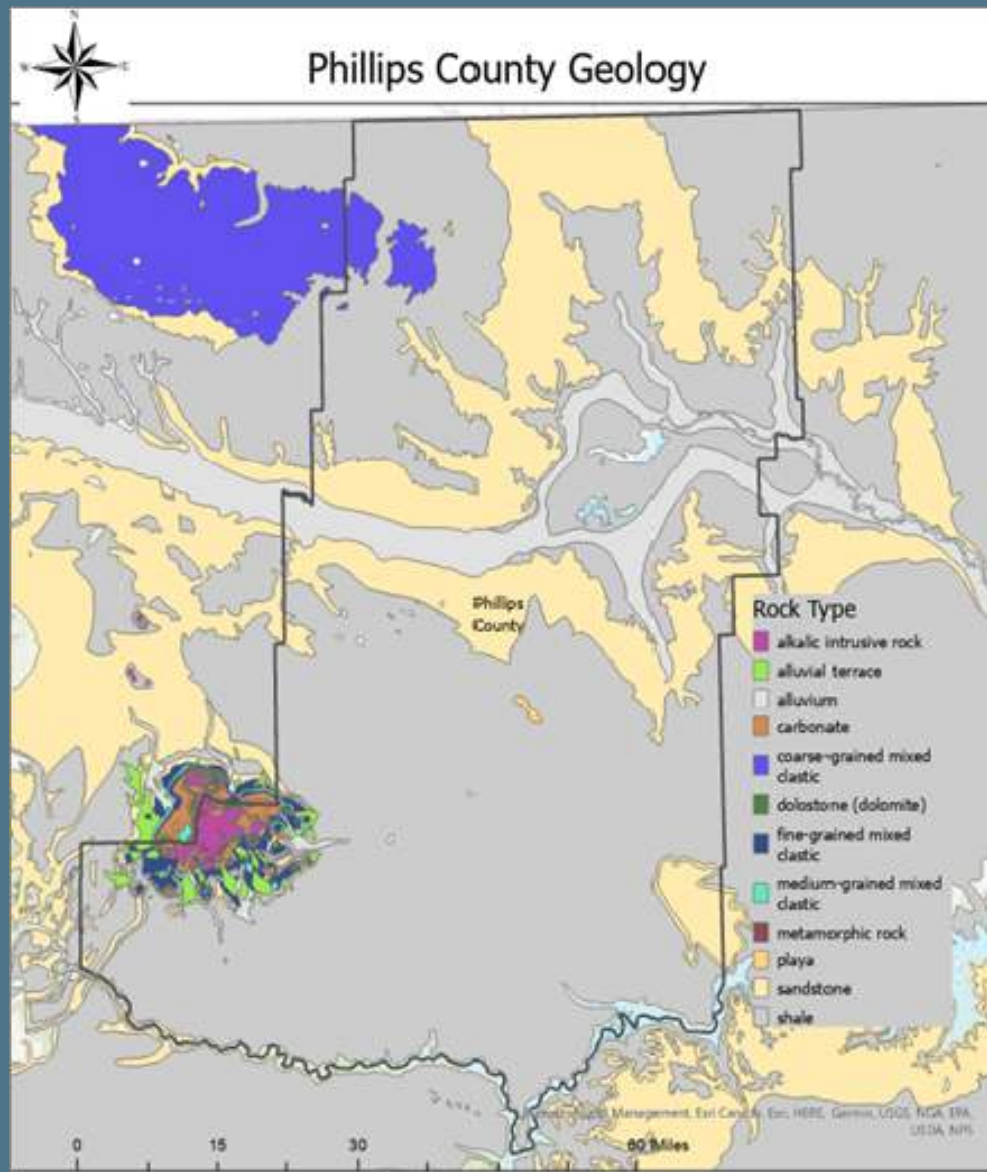
The geology of Phillips County is comprised of the following:

- 52% of the Bear Paw Formation - Dark gray shale with several zones of calcareous concretions, a basal zone of ferruginous concretions, and numerous thin bentonite beds. Marine. Thickness as much as 300 m (984 ft).
- 18% of Judith River Formation - Light brown to light gray, fine- to coarse-grained sandstone with interbeds of gray to black carbonaceous shale, silty shale, and thin coal.
- 11% Claggett Formation - Dark gray to gray shale that weathers brown, with thin, gray sandstone laminae and beds in upper or middle part and calcareous concretions in lower part. Marine. Thickness as much as 170 m (558 ft).
- 9% alluvium - Gravel, sand, silt, and clay deposits of stream and river channels, and floodplains; and
- 6% tertiary gravel - Variable deposits that range from pebble to boulder size and include sand, silt, and clay. Dominantly alluvial terrace, abandoned channel and floodplain, remnant alluvial fan, and local glacial outwash.
- The remaining 5% is a combination of sandstones and quaternary gravels (USGS.gov).

MINING HISTORY

This history is from the Phillips County 2020 Long Range Plan: “According to the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Zortman/Landusky Mines (ZML) dated 1995 additional gold and silver exist within the Little Rocky Mountains. All of the former private land and mineral rights held by Pegasus Gold have been sold to private interests. Bentonite was actively mined at various surface pits south of Malta from 1970 to mid-1980’s and processed at a former plant located east of Malta. AMCOL International Corporation holds 94 patents on 5,083 acres in Phillips County. AMCOL’s subsidiary, American Colloid mined and processed bentonite in the area in the mid 1980’s. AMCOL International Corp. (parent company to American Colloid Company and its mining and processing operations in southeastern Montana and Wyoming) holds a significant number of mining patents related to bentonite minerals. According to AMCOL officials, the company presently has no plans to resume operations in Phillips County”.

More than \$77 million was spent to attempt to rehabilitate the Zortman/Landusky Mine, which stopped operations in 1996 and was, while in operation, the “world’s largest heap leach mine”. There is renewed interest in the mine, although there is also strong opposition to mine reopening at this time (deq.mt.gov).



WATER

The Milk River Project in north-central Montana furnishes water for the irrigation of about 121,000 acres of land. Project features include Lake Sherburne; Nelson and Fresno Storage Dams; Dodson, Vandalia, St. Mary, Paradise, and Swift Current Diversion Dams; Dodson Pumping Plant; 200 miles of canals; 219 miles of laterals; and 295 miles of drains (2017 Growth Policy). This is an important water source for irrigation and agricultural uses. In addition, the communities along the Milk River utilize it for public drinking water systems.

The Missouri River creates the southern border of Phillips County. There are important tourism opportunities along the river, including the Charles M. Russell National Wildlife refuge, Fort Peck Lake, and the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument.

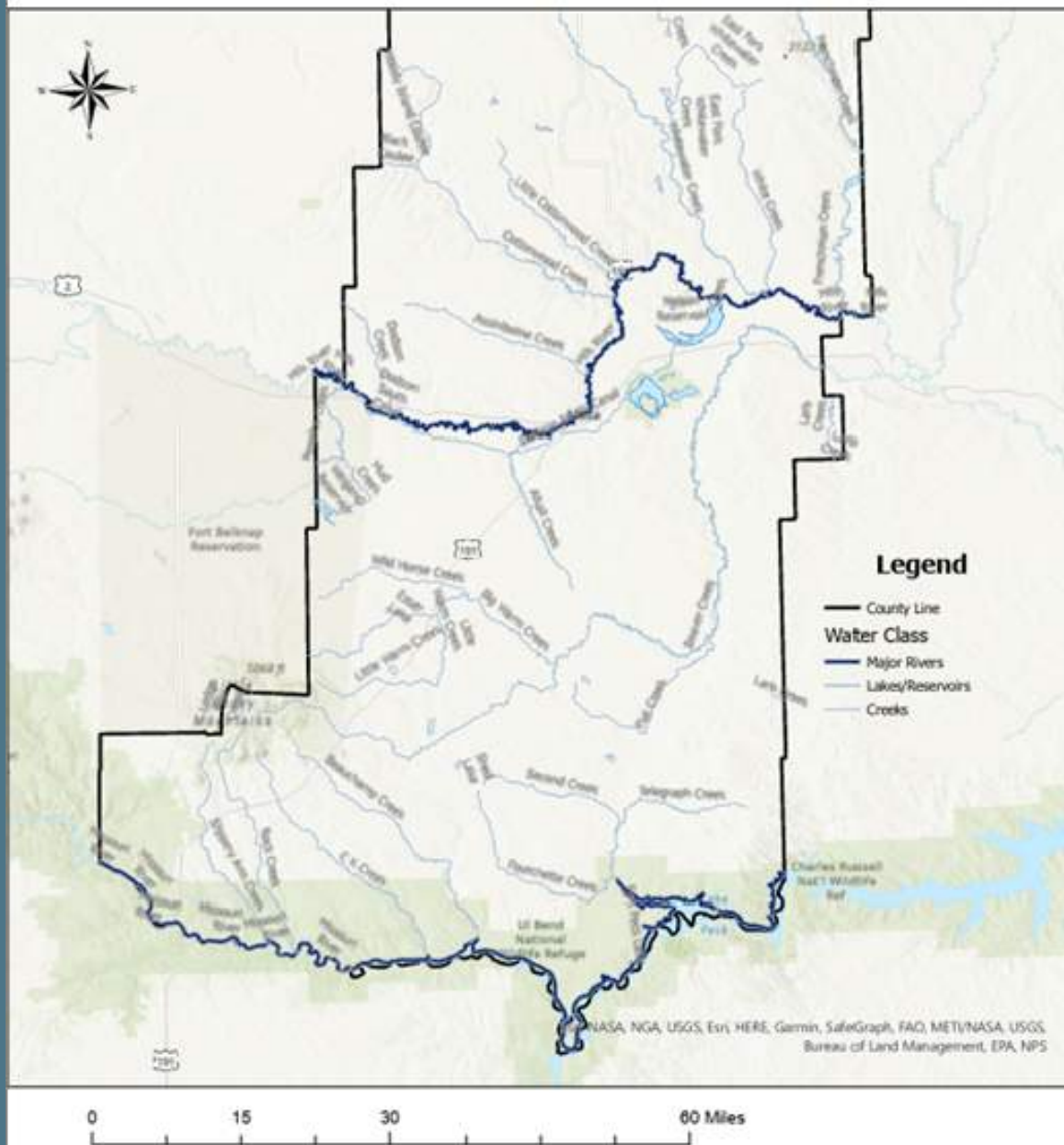
There are almost 1,500 miles of streams and creeks in the county. Like on the larger rivers, some of this water has been allocated for agriculture.

WILDLIFE

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service is currently conducting a big game habitat improvement project in the Phillips County area. “The Big Game Habitat Improvement Project will address threats to big game migration corridors and winter ranges through outreach, technical assistance, and producer contracts” (nrcs.usda.gov). One aspect of the program is to help grasslands resist drought, “restoring marginal cropland to perennial grasses”. The County supports range for elk, white-tailed deer, mule deer, pronghorn, and other smaller native species.

According to US Fish and Wildlife Service, the “UL Bend National Wildlife Refuge and Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge encompass an area of 1.1 million acres that span about 125 air miles along the Missouri River, from the Fort Peck Dam west to the boundary with the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument” (<https://www.fws.gov/refuge/ul-bend>).

Phillips County Hydrology



FLOODPLAINS

In 2020, the Montana Department of Natural Resources published a hydrological study by Michel Baker Int. of the Milk River. “Historical accounts of flooding in the Milk River basin date back to the late 1800s. Based on a 1932 congressional report, 72 floods occurred during the span from 1880 to 1931 (FEMA, 2006). Many were reported to be the result of rapid spring snowmelt, with some additional peak flows resulting from heavy intense rainfall between May and September and some instances of rain combined with snowmelt during March and April. Ice jams that form during the spring runoff can increase the severity of the localized flooding by increasing stage” (dnrc.mt.gov).

on the following page is a map of the Great Plains Floodplain from the Montana Field Guide. Much of Phillips County is included in this floodplain.

EARTHQUAKE FAULTS

There are earthquake faults in Phillips County near the Little Rocky Mountains. However, risk of an earthquake is very low: the USGS predicts a .19% chance of a major earthquake within the next 50 years (homefacts.com).

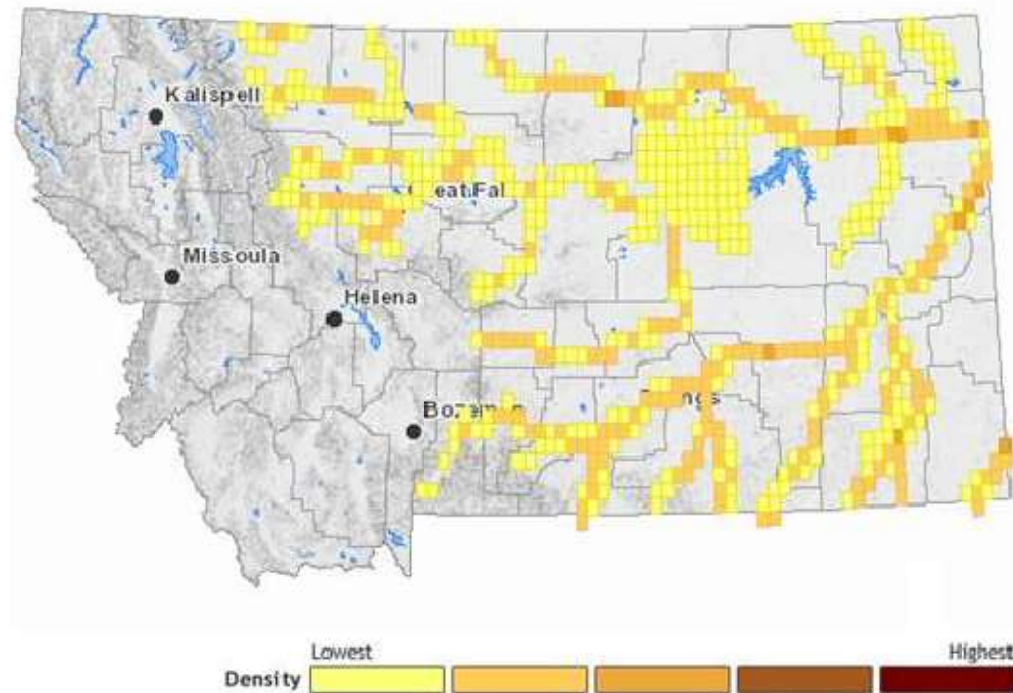
WILDFIRE

The 2021 Pine Grove Fire burned over 16,000 acres on the Fort Belknap Reservation and near Zortman. Many structures were burned, and residents were displaced. The July Fire of 2017 burned more than 10,000 acres and was also near Zortman.

Drought can cause extreme fire conditions, leading to the easy and frequent starting of wildfires. According to drought.gov, 100% of Phillips County is abnormally dry and remains in drought. Go to <https://www.drought.gov/states/montana/county/Phillips>.

Ecological System Distribution

Approximately 1,712 square kilometers are classified as Great Plains Floodplain in the 2017 Montana Land Cover layers. Grid on map is based on USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle map boundaries.



NATURAL RESOURCES GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROJECTED TRENDS

GOAL 1

Protect and preserve Phillips County hunting, fishing, natural resource, and agricultural activities.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Encourage preservation of existing public access to public land and water.
Policy 2	Support private landowners utilizing their property for hunting and/or outfitting.
Policy 3	Support natural resources where feasible and appropriate.
Policy 4	Encourage rangeland studies to monitor wildlife relationships to the available habitat and the impact on vegetation enhancement projects by wildlife.
Policy 5	Collaborate and coordinate with state and federal agencies on plans and regulations regarding wildlife.
Policy 6	Encourage cooperation between state and federal agencies and private landowners to provide stable wildlife populations.

GOAL 2

Maintain an informed relationship with natural resource-based industries, including but not limited to natural gas exploration, drilling, distribution, and wholesale sectors.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Actively participate in processes related to land use and management impacting Phillips County and the region.

GOAL 3

Preserve the water resources in Phillips County for the benefit of the current and future residents.

POLICY	DESCRIPTION
Policy 1	Support private property and allocated water rights in the County.
Policy 2	Keep rural areas low density.
Policy 3	Develop incentives or other funding to help residents keep septic systems from failing

PROJECTED TRENDS

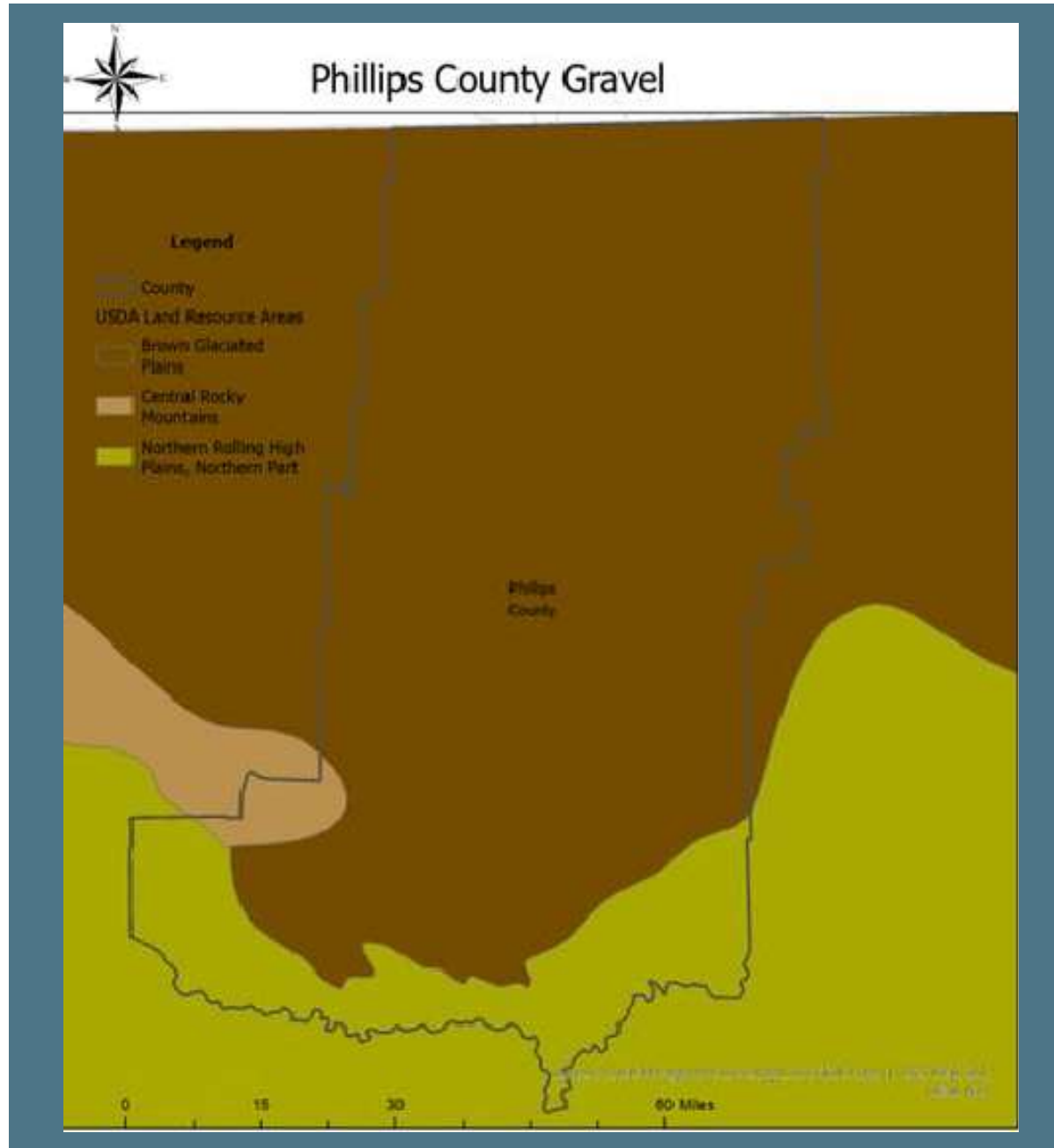
Due to the vast size and rural nature of Phillips County, the natural resources should not be expected to undergo excessive strain in the near future.



CHAPTER 8

SAND AND GRAVEL RESOURCES

Gravel resources can potentially help the local infrastructure construction economy, providing jobs and keeping infrastructure building and maintenance costs down. There are several permitted gravel pits in Phillips County and an additional pit is pending approval. The illustration below, from the Montana DEQ mapping page, shows the extent of gravel pits in the county.



This map depicts the land types that have gravel in the soil in Phillips County.

The gravel in Phillips County is geologically part of the "Brown Glaciated Plains" of Phillips County (brown on map). "These soils are moderately deep to very deep. Depth to sand and gravel is typically 10-20 inches. The soil occupies uplands and side slopes of valleys. These are well drained soils that formed in gravelly alluvium. Permeability class is moderate to moderately slow. The surface textures are loam, sandy loam and fine sandy loam. Subsurface textures are usually clay loam and sandy clay loam. The upper 10-12 inches of the soil has less gravel than the next 8-10 inches. Soil ph varies from 6.6 to 9.0."

CHAPTER 9: IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

MCA 76-1-103 (4) defines a Growth Policy as follows:

“‘Growth Policy’ means a comprehensive development plan, master plan, or comprehensive plan that was adopted pursuant to this chapter before October 1, 1999, or a policy that was adopted pursuant to this chapter on or after October 1, 1999” (leg.mt.gov).

Section 102 guides communities to “encourage local units of government to improve the present health, safety, convenience, and welfare of their citizens and to plan for the future development of their communities to the end that highway systems be carefully planned; that new community centers grow only with adequate highway, utility, health, educational, and recreational facilities; that the needs of agriculture, industry, and business be recognized in future growth; that residential areas provide healthy surroundings for family life; and that the growth of the community be commensurate with and promotive of the efficient and economical use of public funds” (leg.mt.gov).

Indeed, “a timetable for implementing the Growth Policy” is a requirement of 76-1-601. Public process is an important part of creating and adopting a Growth Policy. Because a Growth Policy is a framework it may not address every growth issue. However, other plans may be amended into the Growth Policy. Examples are a Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), an economic development plan, a public facilities plan, a transportation plan, or an affordable housing plan.

It is through these other documents that many of the Growth Policy goals and policies will be addressed and achieved. All plans created in Phillips County should involve the public and utilize public comment and vision.

CHAPTER 10:

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGIES

DRINKING WATER SYSTEMS

Funding to upgrade public water systems is available through the Montana Coal Endowment Program, the Community Development Block Grant program, and other funding sources. However, funds are limited, and the application process is highly competitive. It is important for the county to keep and utilize a capital improvements plan (CIP) updated regularly, ideally every two to five years.

WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITIES

Funding mechanisms that can be used to upgrade public wastewater systems are similar to those applicable to water systems. Again, a CIP will help the county budget funds for anticipated upgrades.

SOLID WASTE FACILITIES

Plan for upgrades to collection sites as needed. There is a special district already in place to generate funding.

FIRE PROTECTION FACILITIES

To implement Goals 2 and 3, the County or its representative will conduct grant research for firefighting and wildfire funding.

ROADS AND BRIDGES

The implementation of road and bridge upgrades will be a substantial part of the County CIP as roads are always a high priority.

CHAPTER 11: COORDINATION STATEMENT

Cooperation and coordination between jurisdictions are crucial tools for delivering the most efficient services to the taxpayer and managing projects across the county. Building strong inter-government cooperation and coordination is important. The county fosters this environment by working with partner governments to identify and implement low-cost, short-term projects to build confidence and trust while demonstrating success. These small projects could be as simple as applying for a small grant as a partner with the City of Malta or contributing labor towards a community project in a municipality. To develop partnerships and collaboration on long-term projects, the County Commissioners could coordinate quarterly meetings between the leadership of Dodson, Malta, and Saco.

CHAPTER 12:

SUBDIVISION REVIEW CRITERIA

The Montana Code Annotated (76-1-601) suggests that a statement defining subdivision criteria be included in the Growth Policy. Specifically, how public hearing for subdivision review will be conducted. The current Phillips County Subdivision Regulations state the following about public hearings on subdivision review:

a. Hearing

The planning board shall hold a public hearing on the subdivision application when a hearing is required by these regulations.

b. Notice

- i. The planning board shall give notice of the time, date and location of the hearing by publication in a newspaper of general circulation in the county not less than 15 days prior to the dates of the hearing.
- i. At least 15 days prior to the date of the hearing, the planning board shall give notice of the hearing by certified mail to the subdivider, each adjoining landowner to the land included in the preliminary plat, and each purchaser under contract for deed of property immediately adjoining the land included in the preliminary plat.
- i. The planning board shall require that notices be posted at conspicuous places on the site of the proposed subdivision.

This statement may be updated in revisions to the Subdivision Regulations, which are currently in process. It is anticipated that new Subdivision Regulations will be adopted by the end of 2023.

CHAPTER 13: PHILLIPS COUNTY LAND RESOURCE USE PLAN

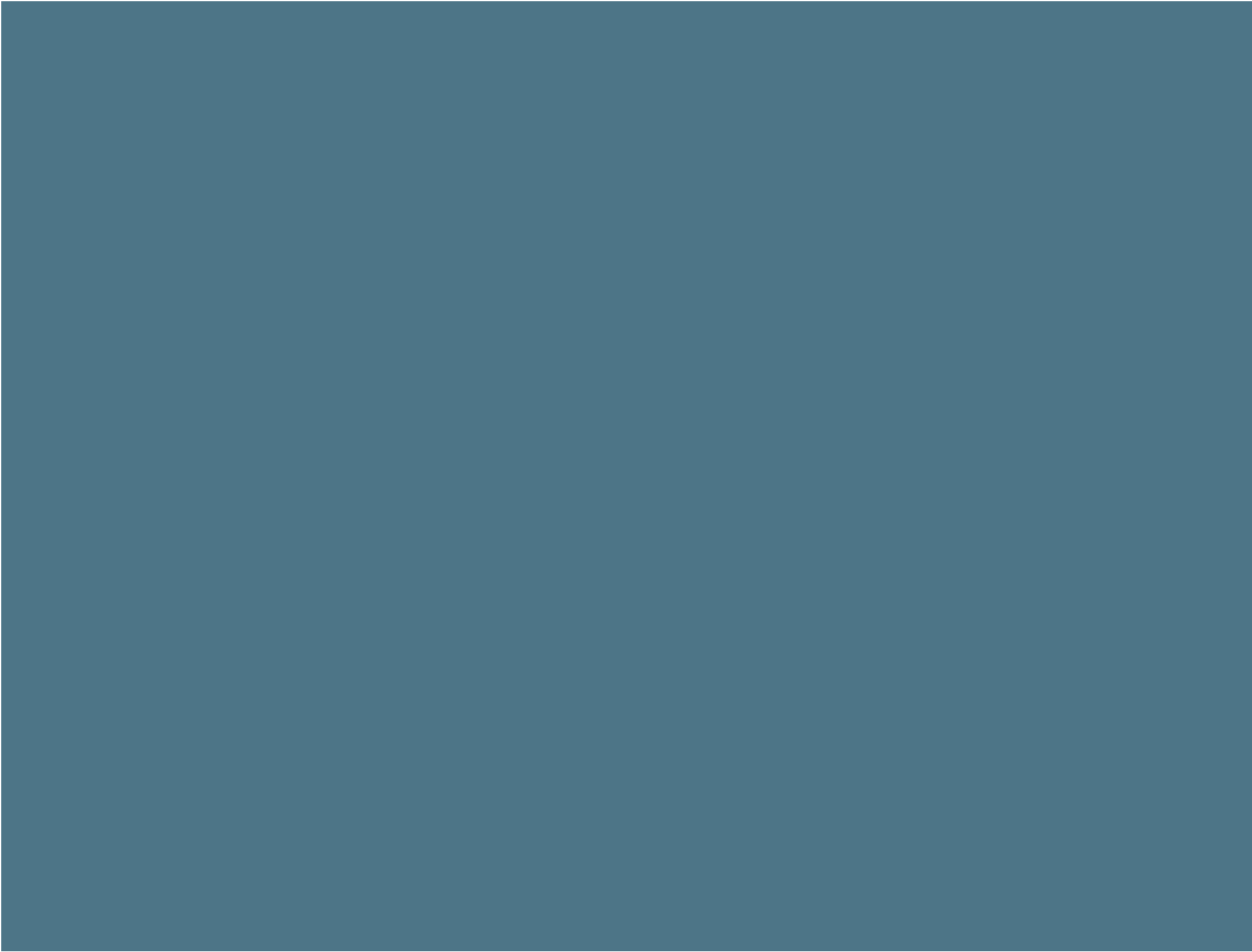
MCA 76-1-601 also mentions that the Growth Policy consider if the Subdivision Regulations should address “whether or not there is a need to:

- (i) delineate the wildland-urban interface; and
- (ii) adopt regulations requiring:
 - (A) defensible space around structures;
 - (B) adequate ingress and egress to and from structures and developments to facilitate fire suppression activities; and
 - (C) adequate water supply for fire protection.”

The Planning Board and Board of County Commissioners will discuss this during the current Subdivision Regulations update.

CHAPTER 13: PHILLIPS COUNTY LAND AND RESOURCES USE PLAN

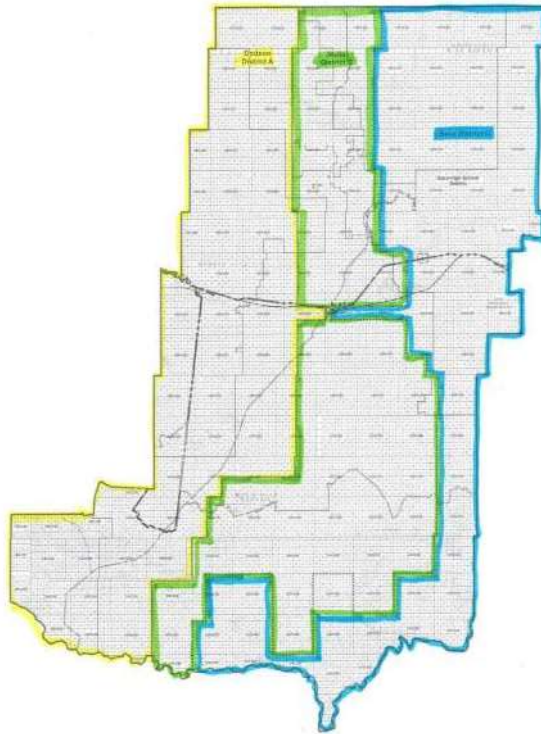
The Phillips County Land Resource Use Plan is hereby incorporated as Appendix C to the Phillips County Growth Policy.



APPENDIX A

COMMISSION DISTRICTS

Phillips County
County Commissioner Districts



County Commissioner Districts with 2020 Census Population
Malta, Phillips County



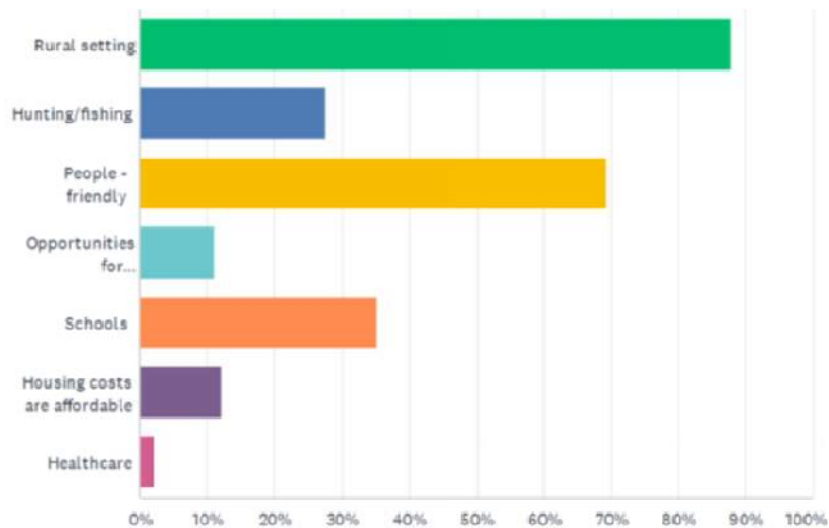


APPENDIX B

PUBLIC SURVEY RESPONSES

Q1 What do you like best about living in Phillips County? (Select 3)

Answered: 91 Skipped: 1



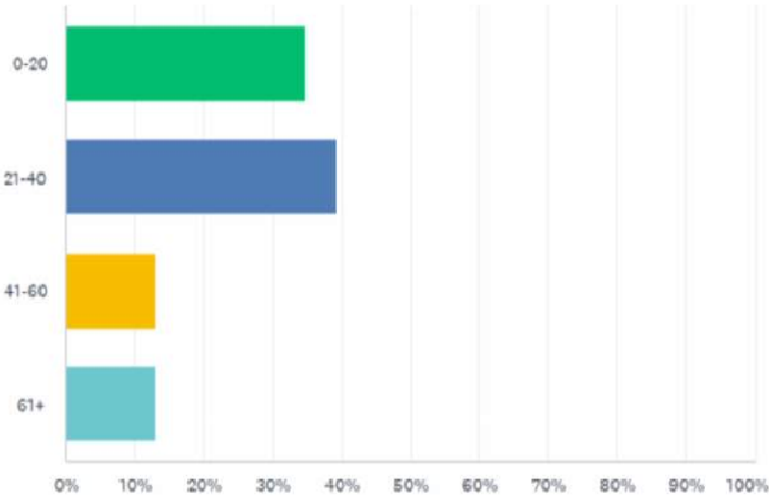
The majority of the respondents live in Phillips County because of the friendly people and the rural setting. Good schools and good hunting and fishing are another big reason people like this area.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Rural setting	87.91%	80
Hunting/fishing	27.47%	25
People - friendly	69.23%	63
Opportunities for work/business ownership	10.99%	10
Schools	35.16%	32
Housing costs are affordable	12.09%	11
Healthcare	2.20%	2
Total Respondents: 91		

As indicated by this graphic, the majority of residents have lived in the county less than 40 years. It would seem that is why the average length of time residents have lived in Phillips County is less than 40 years, with almost 35% being relative newcomers (0-20 years).

Q2 How long have you lived in Phillips County?

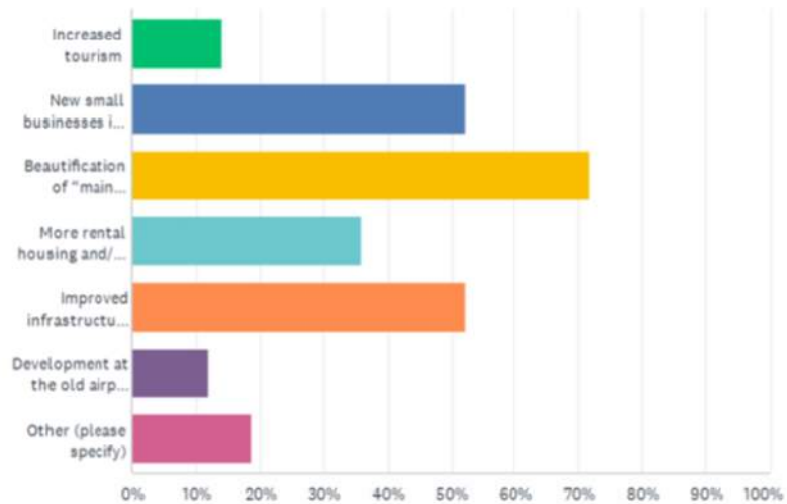
Answered: 92 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
0-20	34.78%	32
21-40	39.13%	36
41-60	13.04%	12
61+	13.04%	12
TOTAL		92

Q3 What would you like to see in the future? (Select 3)

Answered: 92 Skipped: 0

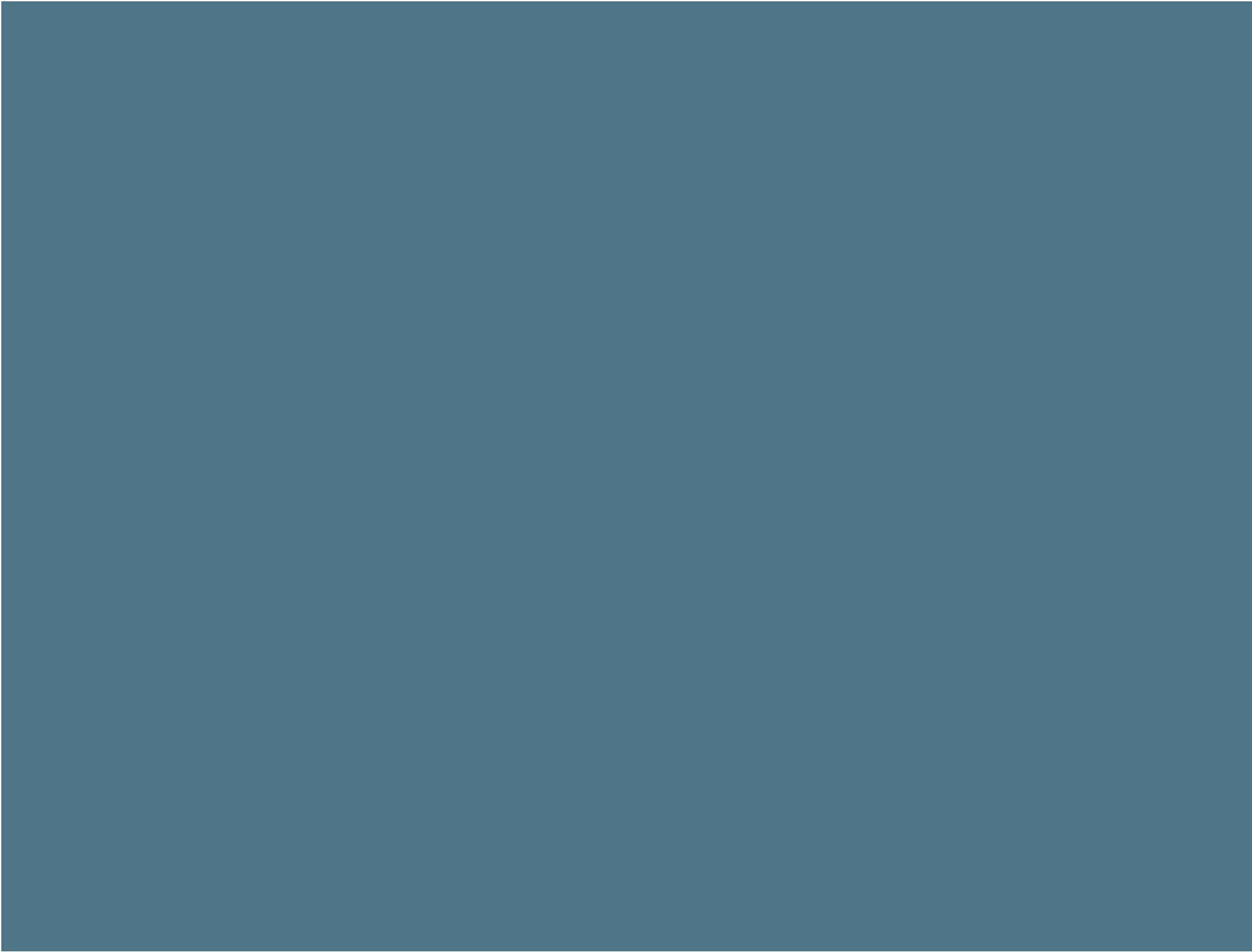


Beautification of "Main Streets" ranked as the highest priority for the public, while small business attraction and improved infrastructure were tied in 2nd place. Rental housing and the category "other" ranked 3rd and 4th.. Most of the comments specified in "Other" addressed the closing of the Hi-Line Retirement Center and beautification/clean up in Malta.

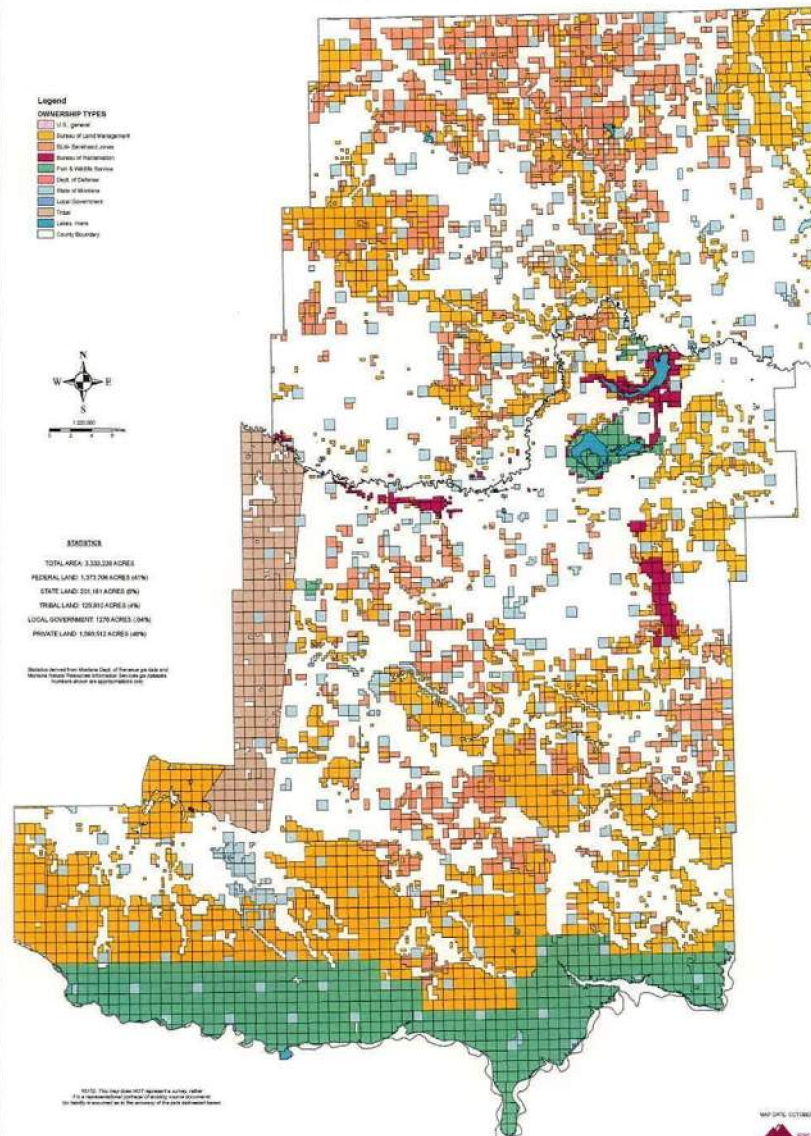
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Increased tourism	14.13%	13
New small businesses in the downtowns.	52.17%	48
Beautification of "main streets".	71.74%	66
More rental housing and/or "missing middle" housing (generally mid-range prices)	35.87%	33
Improved infrastructure in the county	52.17%	48
Development at the old airport aka Malta Business and Industry Development District	11.96%	11
Other (please specify)	18.48%	17
Total Respondents: 92		

APPENDIX C

PHILLIPS COUNTY LAND RESOURCE USE PLAN



PHILLIPS COUNTY, MONTANA LAND OWNERSHIP MAP



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