



## Grant Details

### 125123 - FY24 DMO Plan

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128710 - FY24 Red Lodge DMO Plan

DOC Office of Tourism

**Grant Title:** FY24 Red Lodge DMO Plan

**Grant Number:** 24-52-OOT-DMO-024

**Grant Status:** Underway

**Comments:**

**Applicant Organization:** Red Lodge Chamber of Commerce/Visitors Center

**Grantee Contact:** Sherry Weamer

**Award Year:** FY24

**Program Area:** DOC Office of Tourism

**Amounts:**

<b>Contract Dates:</b>	Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed
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<b>Project Dates:</b>	06/13/2023	07/01/2023	06/30/2024
	Proposal Date	Project Start	Project End

**Grant Administrator:** Barb Sanem

**Contract Number:** 24-52-OOT-DMO-024

**Award Year:** FY24

**Contract Dates**

Contract Sent	Contract Received	Contract Executed	Contract Legal
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**Project Dates** 07/01/2023

06/30/2024

Project Start	Project End
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**Comments**

**Amendment Comments**

## **DMO Plan Narrative**

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### **1. Describe Your Destination**

***Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.***

Nestled in Montana's magnificent Beartooth Mountains and surrounded by Custer Gallatin National Forest, Red Lodge delivers world-class outdoor recreation and access to Yellowstone National Park via the world-renowned Beartooth Highway. In our historic downtown, you'll enjoy locally owned shops, quality restaurants and plenty of first-class accommodations and entertainment. No matter what the season, Red Lodge is your Base Camp to the Beartooths.

The Red Lodge visitor arrives here looking forward to its natural beauty and quaint charm. What they discover is its magic. And for that, they return again and again, over a lifetime. Like so much of Montana, Red Lodge is surrounded by natural splendor -- Montana's highest peaks frame our back yards, its crystal-clear waterways tumble down our valleys, and that unique combination of pine and aspen scents invigorate our air. But as the Red Lodge visitor knows, we have something special going on here; we're just far enough off the beaten path that locals truly appreciate visitors, we want to say "Hello" when we see someone new in town, and we do not just throw out the welcome mat for you, we show you why we love living here.

Today's travelers are looking for that one of a kind of experience, and it's one Red Lodge excels at delivering.

A year-round population of just over 2,000 and an historic Main Street business district with great restaurants, shopping, entertainment, and accommodations means a stay in Red Lodge is an opportunity to make friends with locals.

Red Lodge, Montana, 2016 Gateway Community of the Year, anchors the most scenic route into Yellowstone National Park: the 68-mile alpine and structural wonder of the Beartooth Highway, an "All-American Road". Open late May-October, visitors come from around the world to experience its summer snowfields, high-mountain vistas, and legendary curves.

Sitting on the edge of a National Forest, Red Lodge lays claim to almost 1 million acres of uninterrupted and unspoiled wild country as our "backyard." Much of that is easily accessible with well-marked trails for hikers, horseback riders, and many near town are even open to bicyclists. Whatever the day's adventures entail; Red Lodge is the perfect Base Camp to the Beartooths.

#### **OUR STRENGTHS:**

##### **Gateway to Yellowstone National Park**

*The Most Scenic Route to Yellowstone Park, over the Beartooth Highway*

##### **The Beartooth Highway**

Dubbed "the most beautiful roadway in America" by On the Road correspondent Charles Kuralt, the Beartooth Highway climbs to an astounding 10,947 feet above sea level. As it winds its way from Red Lodge to Yellowstone National Park, the Highway traverses an impressive range of ecosystems and geological wonders. At the highway's

summit, travelers find themselves in a sky-high world of glacial cirques, clear alpine lakes, and snow that lingers through the summer months.

### **Gateway to the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness**

Our back yard consists of millions of acres of high-country wilderness. As early as 1897, trails began snaking their way up the West Fork canyon, cleared by hand with saws and pickaxes. Today those same trails can take you to pristine country where visitors can enjoy a variety of outdoor activities.

### **Great Shops, Restaurants and Music Entertainment**

Charming historic downtown hosts a variety of locally owned stores run by helpful, knowledgeable staff. Pop into one of the many restaurants for a quick burger and a locally brewed beer, or experience fine dining featuring wild game and other local fare. In 2018, eight of our local restaurants were selected to participate in Taste Our Place which is a program launched by the State of Montana. The Taste Our Place logo is a declaration of authentic Montana Quality. Relax and listen to some great music from our many local musicians or attend a first run movie at the historic Roman Theater.

### **Year-round Skiing**

During the winter months enjoy bountiful snow, shimmering blue skies and terrain for all abilities that make for great fun on the slopes. Open from mid-November through mid-April.

During the summer months, the Beartooth Highway is your chair lift to acres of open terrain for skiing and snowboarding. For those that are not much interested in hiking there is Beartooth Basin with two permanent poma lifts for skier access to the Twin Lakes headwall.

### **Arts and Culture**

Catch the spirit of today at one of the many art and photography galleries in town or experience various styles of art at the Carbon County Arts Guild & Depot Gallery and the Red Lodge Clay Center. For history enthusiasts, Red Lodge is home to the Carbon County Historical Society and Museum where visitors can learn about the colorful history of Red Lodge and the surrounding areas.

### **Events and Attractions**

Red Lodge is home to many events and year-round attractions. Yellowstone Wildlife Sanctuary - Home of Champions Rodeo - Beartooth Rally - Montana Renaissance Festival - National Finals Ski-Joring - Christmas Stroll - Fun Run - Iron Horse Motorcycle Rodeo - Red Lodge Songwriter Festival - Bearcreek Downs Pig Races - Beartooth Run – Red Lodge Car Show and many more.

### **Proximity to Billings**

Billings is the largest city in Montana with a population of over 110,000 and a major transportation hub for South Central Montana. Travelers can reach Billings by air, bus or car on two east and west and north and south Interstates highways. Billings Logan International Airport is served by four major airlines United, Delta, Alaska, and American.

### **Amenities**

Red Lodge may seem like a remote destination to some visitors, but they will be pleased to find we have the same amenities and comforts as they have at home, and more than adequate cell phone coverage and broadband internet in most areas.

## **OPPORTUNITIES:**

### **Motorcycle/Auto Groups**

The Beartooth Highway was recently voted the *Number 1 Motorcycling Road in America* by the American Motorcyclist Association. It is a “bucket list” item for many motorcycle enthusiasts.

### **Small Groups**

Red Lodge is the perfect destination for small groups. RV clubs, executive retreats, conventions of 100 people or less, craft clubs, all find the comfortable meeting spaces and hospitality of Red Lodge a great place to spur creativity, make new friendships and renew old relationships.

### **Weddings/Reunions**

Picturesque venues, quality lodging options and numerous recreational opportunities in the surrounding area make Red Lodge the perfect setting to gather family and friends for your wedding or reunion.

### **Tournaments/Community Events**

The newly revamped Roosevelt Center, our modern high school auditorium, and other historic venues, provide the opportunity to house tournaments as well as larger community events.

### **Outdoor Competitions**

Challenging, yet stunningly beautiful terrain attracts competitors from around the country to a multitude of outdoor events. Included among these events are the Beartooth Run, Nitty Gritty Road Race, Collegiate Ski Races, Red Lodge Randonnée Race, National Finals Ski Joring Championships, and the summer Gravel Tour Bike tour are helping make Red Lodge a destination for outdoor competitions consideration.

### **Media Partnership Opportunities**

Billings has a wide reach with television, radio and print media that we can better utilize with positive and timely press releases and promotional partnering. More can be done with KTVQ, KULR, YPR, and the print media options in Billings, Yellowstone Valley Women, and Magic Magazine, among others.

### **Annual Events**

Red Lodge has a growing number of competitive, recreational and cultural events. Many of these events take place during the summer months but winter events such as the Alpine Ski Races, National Ski Joring Championships, and Winter Fest also attract visitors from in state and out of state locations. In the Summertime we have Red Lodge Music Festival, Montana Renaissance Festival, Red Lodge Songwriter Festival, Fourth of July Rodeos and Parades, Beartooth Basin Summer Ski Area, Beartooth Bike Rally, Red Lodge Car Show, and Labor Day Fun Run just to name a few.

### **Location and Way Finding Signage**

Red Lodge is miles from a major highway. Montana Highway signs point Yellowstone Park travelers past Red Lodge exits or towards the Chief Joseph Highway in Wyoming. Location and Way Finding Signage has finally come to fruition and will be implemented in time for this year tourist season.

## **OUR CHALLENGES:**

## **2022 Flooding**

The devastating images and videos are out there however, Red Lodge was and is very much open and looking forward to people visiting our area. We are still taking phone calls asking if our restaurants will be open by summer, are there hotels to stay in, and what roads are open. The positive in this challenge is, visitors are planning on coming to Red Lodge and rather than assuming Red Lodge floated away, they are checking in to get accurate information. We are cautiously optimistic that while the floods upset visitors' routine visits to Red Lodge that we can re-capture or remind them Red Lodge is ready for their visit.

## **Making Red Lodge a Destination**

Red Lodge is used as a 'Pass Through' for the Beartooth Highway and Yellowstone Park in the summer. If we can influence a small percentage of summer travelers to stay one additional night in Red Lodge and enjoy all the offerings of our town and surrounding area, it will make a significant impact on our local economy. In the winter months we need to reinforce Red Lodge as a winter destination to skiers and non-skiers alike. First class restaurants, comfortable accommodations, great shopping, restful relaxation, ice-skating, Nordic skiing, wildlife viewing, and hiking are a few of the winter time activities available in Red Lodge. Red Lodge Mountain is a fabulous, family-oriented alpine ski area.

The Phase I Wayfinding signage directing visitors to "Attractions" and "RV Parking/Additional Parking" has helped catch some of the "pass through" traffic/visitors, but last minute lodging vacancies are difficult to come by during our busy warm season.

As Red Lodge has gained popularity because of the space and activities visitors are seeking, there are concerns about the sustainability of tourism around the area. Therefore, the Red Lodge Area Chamber has stepped in/up to offer materials to businesses that will help educate and encourage visitors to the area to visit and recreate responsibly.

In addition to this, the City of Red Lodge has expressed concerns regarding the marketing of Red Lodge as a destination. There is no allocated Resort Tax funding via the City of Red Lodge for marketing.

## **Location and Way Finding Signage**

Red Lodge is miles from a major highway. Montana Highway signs point Yellowstone Park travelers past Red Lodge exits or towards the Chief Joseph Highway in Wyoming.

**Montana is perceived as challenging to access.** In addition to the states' destination attribute weaknesses, both the Montana and Red Lodge brand brings with it this perceived access challenge.

## **Beartooth Highway is Seasonal**

Weather and snow plow funding often delay the opening of the Beartooth Highway in the spring. Snowstorms will temporarily close the road. Timely communication of the road status is challenging with reports of closures carrying a higher priority than reports of the Highway re-opening. The portion of the Highway located in Wyoming is a secondary priority for snowplows.

## **Make Winter Success Less Dependent on the Snow Conditions at Red Lodge Mountain**

Red Lodge Mountain is the major draw for Red Lodge in the winter season. The town's commerce follows the quality of the snow conditions on the mountain. We can reduce the dips when snow conditions are not at their best by promoting all of the other amenities, events and winter time activities going on in Red Lodge. Red Lodge is within easy reach of public access to BLM lands, Forest Service lands, and national parks. Hiking, cross country skiing, wildlife viewing, scenic drives, shopping, fine dining, and relaxing in one of our great accommodations to name a few.

## **Online Mapping Services**

Google Maps and others report inaccurate information for routes and business addresses.

## **Lack of City Marketing Support**

While the City of Red Lodge collects a Resort Tax, the governing body offers no marketing or promotional funds for Red Lodge.

## **Perceived lack of comforts/technologies**

Montana is perceived to be somewhat remote and lacking many of the amenities and technologies those travelers who may be less outdoor minded are looking for.

**Perceived costs and time requirements inhibit visitation to Montana.** Research shows focus group and in-depth participants expressed serious concerns about the cost of a trip to Montana. Beyond the cost of traveling to Montana, many generally felt that a trip to Montana would require a significant investment of time.

## **COMPETITOR ANALYSIS:**

### **Jackson Hole, WY**

Popular tourism destination because of its proximity to Yellowstone & Grand Teton National Parks. Website, mobile, social media, and internet advertising resources.

### **Livingston, MT/Gardiner, MT**

Way finding signage on I-90. Year-round entrance to Yellowstone Park.

### **Bozeman, MT / Big Sky, MT**

Greater variety in lodging, dining and shopping opportunities, including groups, conventions and conferences. Proximity to Yellowstone Park. Four-season activities. Popular ski area. Cultural, historic, and educational activities, events, and attractions. Significantly greater marketing dollars.

### **West Yellowstone, MT**

West entrance to Yellowstone Park. The name West Yellowstone. More lodging and dining options. Significantly greater marketing dollars.

### **Cody, WY**

Eastern gateway to Yellowstone Park, access to five scenic byways including Chief Joseph Highway is a second route to Beartooth Highway and Northeast entrance. Lodging options, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, regional airport. By partnering with Wyoming Tourism, Cody has successfully marketed itself as "Yellowstone Country" and its airport "Yellowstone Airport." Significantly more funding for promotion is directed to Cody by local, county and state monies.

## **Colorado**

Travelers' perceptions make Colorado Montana's top competitor. In addition to awareness, demand, excitement for and visitation at significantly higher rates than Montana, research illuminated the directly competitive relationship Colorado represents. In discussing where to go in the West and Montana specifically, it was clear that most research

participants viewed Colorado as the destination they would be heavily weighing Montana against, and a more persuasive one at that. These travelers felt Colorado had similar offerings on a basic level—spectacular natural beauty, abundance of outdoor recreation, outdoor culture, winter sports. Very importantly, Colorado’s cities, infrastructure and mature tourism product were seen as providing more of a “safety net,” something that was keenly on the minds of those who were less on the outdoor spectrum and/or less familiar with traveling in this region of the U.S.

## **2. Align with Montana Brand**

*Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.*

The Montana Brand Pillars were seemingly written for Red Lodge.

Nestled in the Beartooth Mountains, with Yellowstone Park just up the road, and the Beartooth All American Highway at our doorstep, we truly offer more spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48.

A little off the beaten path Red Lodge, a historic mining town, is a vibrant and charming community that serves as a gateway to many natural wonders.

From art walks to downhill mountain bike rides, from reading a good book by the fire to skiing fresh powder, Red Lodge is a friendly, welcoming town offering a wide range of activities in every season. Enjoy breathtaking experiences by day and relaxing hospitality by night. Regardless of your choice of activities, our people work hard to make your visit an experience to remember.

Tourism Regions, Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVBs), communities and organizations must all work together to make visitors aware of the full array of experiences available to guests.

The Red Lodge Area Chamber of Commerce/VIC/CVB is well marked via our Wayfinding Signage. During our busy summer visitor season, we are open from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday through Friday and 9 am to 1 pm on Saturday. The goal is for each visitor to have a positive experience and plan their return visit to Red Lodge. Visitors are always happy to see we offer public restrooms, current conditions of Beartooth Highway, and local hiking (trail conditions), as well as offer them our Destination Red Lodge Travel planner to take with them to help guide them once they leave the Visitors Center.

We work closely with our tourism partners, TBID, the City of Red Lodge, and Merchants and Lodging Association.

Our content will focus on the three core elements travelers are looking for when deciding on an outdoor destination such as Red Lodge:

1. unique natural encounters without giving up modern comforts
2. comfortable isolation that attracts free-spirited adventurers,
3. a place for entirely new experiences and a place for new ways of experiencing the familiar.

## **3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?**

*Select all that apply: Destination Marketing, Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, Destination Development).*

**Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.**

**3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).**

### **The High Value/Low Impact Potential Visitor**

This group is clearly a high-value audience; it is different from other travelers in important ways. Behaviorally and demographically, the survey shows that high potential Montana visitors have a remarkable and distinctive profile. This group of heavy travelers is not only attracted to Montana, they see the destination as more attractive and competitive when compared to the regional competition. In brief, high potential Montana visitors are:

- City dwellers (i.e., not rural and not suburban)
- Married with children
- Well-educated, Affluent
- Younger
- Frequent travelers
- Male-oriented (54.3% male and 45.7% female)
- Strongly attracted to Montana's tourism offering
- Familiar with Montana's tourism offering
- Likely repeat visitors
- Outdoor-oriented travelers

These high value potential Montana visitors are also heavy consumers of recreational activities. This group is interested in a diverse array of Montana activities, centered around day hiking and visits to the National Parks.

**Family travelers** are a natural fit with Montana's travel product, including that available in the Eastern portion of the state. They are a large and lucrative segment. In the Montana Brand Exploration Survey, approximately one-third, 32.0 percent, of travelers reported having children under the age of 18 in their homes. Like high potential visitors, family travelers index high on outdoor psychographics, have high incomes and would expect to spend more and stay longer in the state than other travelers. Family travelers are interested in a variety of Red Lodge experiences, but their ideal trips would appear to center around Yellowstone National Park, day hiking, horseback riding, and driving scenic byways. This niche market also expresses significant interest in child-friendly activities related to history, culture and geology.

Red Lodge offers affordable vacation opportunities to families visiting Montana for the first time or coming back on a repeat visit. 85% of visitors surveyed responded they will return to Montana within the next two years. These returning visitors are a significant target for our CVB.

**Geo-tourism** is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the distinctive geographical character of a place—its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents. **Geo-travelers** are high-value, low impact visitors who appreciate the unique characteristics, eccentricities and natural qualities of Red Lodge. They place high value on travel experiences that respect and support the local character of place and are less likely to become discouraged in their travel experiences by travel distances/difficulties and vagaries of weather.

### **History Buffs**



History buffs score higher on the psychographic index, have proven to have higher incomes and would spend more and stay longer compared to non-history buffs.

### **Our Traveler at a Glance**

- Healthy, Active, Outdoor Enthusiasts
- Arts, Crafts, Entertainment Enthusiasts
- Motorcyclists and Auto Enthusiasts
- RV Enthusiasts
- Empty Nesters/Active Retirees
- Income: AHI of \$50,000+
- Education: Bachelor's Degree
- Age: 35-65

### **Core Geographic Markets**

Red Lodge is located in the South Central portion of Montana. We are the gateway to the Northeast Entrance to Yellowstone Park via the Beartooth Highway. Because of our geographic location, the majority of visitors come from east of us.

### **Summer**

California, Florida, Texas, Wyoming, Idaho, Colorado, Washington, and the Mid-Western States, particularly Minnesota and Wisconsin.

### **Winter**

California, Florida, Wyoming, North Dakota, Minnesota, and SK/MB Canada are key winter markets.

### **Key Psychographic Markets for Red Lodge.**

- Social Class - middle to upper class (in terms of disposable income)
- Lifestyle - active, outdoor recreational oriented, frequent travelers
- Opinions - interested, but primarily influenced by desire to experience things for themselves
- Attitudes & Interests - outdoor activities, history & culture, foodies
- Attitudes & Beliefs - environmentally conscious, has an adventurous spirit, likes nature
- Technology - savvy - using mobile devices in all stages of planning & travel

### **3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?**

### **Demographic Research**

#### **(ITRR 2022 Interactive Data Non-Resident Travel Survey Report) \***

- Average Age - 60
- Age Groups –16% 35-44 years, 19% 45-54 years, 35% 55-64 years, 50% 65-74 years
- Gender - 64% Male, 35% Female

- Group Size - 52% Couple, 5% Self, 31% Immediate Family
- Average Group Size - 2.24
- Household Income – 21% \$100,000 to less than \$150,000, 20% \$200,000 or greater, 20% \$75,000 to less than \$100,000
- 23% First time visitor

*\*All percentages taken from online ITRR reports with 72 respondents*

#### **Facebook Demographics – Top 4 Categories, 65%, are women**

- 15% Women 35 to 44 Years
- 16% Women 45 to 54 Years
- 10% Women 25 to 34 Years
- 13% Women 55 to 64 Years
- 9% Women 65+ years

#### **Geographic Research – Non Resident**

##### **ITRR – Non Resident**

- ITRR 2019 – Texas, Minnesota, Missouri, Kentucky, Arizona
- ITRR 2020 – Wyoming, Minnesota, California, Colorado
- ITRR 2021 – Wyoming, Minnesota, Washington, Colorado
- ITRR 2022 – Texas, California, Idaho, Washington, Minnesota, Wisconsin

#### **RedLodge.com Travel Planner Requests**

2189 Travel Planners were requested during 2022. One of our most popular pieces of literature is our Destination Red Lodge Travel Planner. Red Lodge continues to become an increasingly popular destination for travelers as Red Lodge so much of what the pandemic traveler and travelers in general are looking for: great outdoor recreational opportunities, wildlife viewing, close proximity to Yellowstone National Park, a variety of lodging options, shopping, and many delicious eateries to choose from. The Midwest accounted for 33.3% of all requests. Top states were Minnesota with 6.5%, Texas with 5%, and Florida with 4.8%

#### **Facebook – Top 5 Cities (Outside Montana)**

- Cody, WY
- Bismarck, ND
- Powell, WY
- Denver, CO
- Gillette, WY

#### **Facebook – Top 5 Cities (Within Montana)**

- Billings
- Red Lodge
- Bozeman
- Laurel
- Missoula

ITTR 2022 non-resident study data showed the average length of stay for non-resident visitors to Montana was 6.07 nights with 54% of in Yellowstone Country. 53% of the Non-resident travelers stated their primary reason for coming is

vacation/recreation/pleasure, which leads to the supposition that they want a broader experience than just visiting Yellowstone Park.

The following 2022 ITTR data outlines what visitors are doing while in our area.

- 58% Scenic driving
- 53% Day hiking
- 35% Wildlife watching
- 33% Nature photography
- 31% Car / RV camping
- 26% Visit local brewery
- 22% Recreational shopping
- 17% Visiting Lewis & Clark sites
- 17% Visiting other historical sites
- 10% Visiting museums
- 9% Visit farmers market
- 9% Birding
- 8% Fishing / fly fishing
- 6% Visit local distillery
- 6% Skiing / snowboarding
- 5% Rockhounding

### **Beartooth Highway Economic Impact Research**

During the winter season, Red Lodge, MT is not considered a gateway community because of road closures limiting access only to Cooke City/Colter Pass/Silver Gate, MT and Cody, WY (via the Chief Joseph Scenic Byway).

Nonresident visitor expenditures contributed to over \$41.1 million in economic activity to Carbon County in 2016, the vast majority being spent in Red Lodge. The economic impact for this region from nonresident travelers is substantial to local communities. Furthermore, results identified that nonresidents perceive the Beartooth Highway as a destination in itself, not simply a highway.

2019 average spending in Carbon County by nonresident visitors to Montana totaled \$63.4 million. This \$63.4 million in local spending directly supports \$40.2 million of economic activity in the region, and supports an additional \$16.1 million of economic activity, indirectly.

Source: [http://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1352&context=itrr\\_pubs](http://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1352&context=itrr_pubs)

### **3c. What are your emerging markets?**

### **Experiential Tourism**

Creating an experience for the potential visitor rather than approaching them through traditional marketing methods. Creating a fun and unique experience is one of the best ways to connect with customers to ensure they want to learn more about an area and what it offers. For example, agritourism or dark skies viewing.

### **Two Wheel travelers**

Motorcyclists and bicyclists are attracted to the Beartooth Highway for its beauty and challenge. This segment of the tourism market is growing and important as they view the Highway as a destination and spend multiple nights in our area.

### **Foodies**

Red Lodge has an array of excellent restaurants, an award winning craft beer brewery, gourmet food and wine shops, for those travelers that seek unique dining experiences. Adventure is food for the soul, and food is fuel for the adventure. After a long day in the great outdoors, there is nothing quite like a warm meal. But not just any warm meal...a really good warm meal with good company. Whether visiting the local burger joint or enjoying an elegant, farm-to-table meal, dining in Red Lodge is sure to please everyone. With a rich agricultural heritage, Red Lodge has a wonderful selection of locally grown products that translates to a thriving dining scene.

### **Entertainment/Music Seekers**

On any given night there are a number of bars and restaurants that feature live music, both local artists and touring bands. During the course of the year, events such as The Red Lodge Music Festival and the Red Lodge Songwriter Festival bring world class musicians to Red Lodge to share their art.

### **Billings**

Billings is 60 miles away and has a population base of approximately 160,000. The Billings Convention and Meeting market is growing and we will continue to develop our relationship with the Billings CVB, Visit Billings. The Billings market is the perfect target to strengthen our winter destination business, especially on non-holiday weekends.

### **Corporate Retreats**

Red Lodge is the perfect place for executive retreats and small group gatherings for associations, social clubs and private companies located in Billings and Bozeman.

### **Areas to the East**

Eastern Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota continue to be strong markets and will be the focus for our Winter destination marketing.

### **Colorado & other Mountain States**

We have listed Colorado previously as a competitor for non-resident visitors. However, state tourism data and our own information indicate a rising interest in visiting Montana and specifically Red Lodge from Coloradans. As their own tourism industry continues to grow and their population continues its rapid growth, the competition for outdoor space grows in equal proportion. Many Colorado residents especially those from major metropolitan areas are looking for less crowded, less expensive, simpler destinations, much the way Colorado used to be. Red Lodge is the perfect fit, an 8-9 hour drive or a one-hour direct flight from Denver, their largest metropolitan area.

#### **4. Define and describe your overall goals.**

*A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.*

The overall goal of the Red Lodge CVB is to increase tourism for our area and ensuring travelers know Red Lodge is OPEN following the mass of flood images and videos that continue to be shared and re-shared. We don't know what our "normal" visitor season numbers look like because we went from being locked down during COVID to everyone wanting to be outside, followed by hell (fires) and high water (2022 flooding). We are focusing on getting back the potential visitor who shifted away from Red Lodge in 2022 while attracting the high value/low impact visitor. We would like to have fewer people visiting Red Lodge, but staying longer. This would have less impact on our area. The Red Lodge area still has a decline in tourism numbers during the winter months. Therefore we will focus on the winter traveler for cooler weather related activities such as skiing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, winter hiking, ski joring, photography and wildlife sightings while also continuing to draw the high value visitor for our warm season as there is still room to increase these collections as well.

1. The DMO wants to continue to grow the busy warm season (July-August-September), but also increase visitors to our fall and winter seasons (October – March).
2. The DMO will begin Phase II of our Wayfinding signage project focusing on the 4 entrances to Red Lodge (N via US 212, S via US 212, W via Hwy 78, and E via Hwy 308).
3. Encourage residents and visitors to keep the Red Lodge area a safe tourism destination by traveling responsibly, leaving no trace, practicing wildland fire safety, being kind, respectful and patient with one another and by recreating responsibly.
4. Continue to Build Marketing Infrastructure

This will include, but not be limited to:

Consistent and informed Visitor Information Center staffing to enhance the guest experience and educate them to all Red Lodge and the surrounding area has to offer.

- Increase Travel Planner Mailers
- Increase public awareness of what is happening in the Red Lodge area with targeted and regular e-news
- Increase social media reach through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
- Continue to promote local events.

#### **4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.**

Tactic 1: Targeted advertising campaigns promoting fall/winter events, such as our popular Christmas Stroll, wildlife viewing, snowshoeing, skiing, and ice skating by expanding our advertising.

Tactic 2: Targeted advertising campaigns promoting warm weather activities unique to our area such as hiking, scenic motorcycle rides, wildlife viewing, dark skies viewing, camping, fishing, or enjoying a day walking our beautiful and

historic downtown while enjoying unique shopping and dining options.

Tactic 3: Improve the visitor experience by providing consistent accurate area information via visitor counselors, travel planners, and additional Wayfinding signage as well as mainting and improving our visitor information center.

**Optional: Add attachment Here**

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**Do you want to add an attachment?**

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## ***Objectives/Metrics/Evaluation***

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Measurable Metrics for Success</b>	<b>Report the Metric Achieved</b>	<b>Evaluation of Measurable Metrics for Success</b>
Increase contact database through travel guide requests.	Increase annual travel guide requests from 2189 in FY23 to 3050.	Yes, travel planner requests increased from 2189 in FY23 to 3082 in FY24.	Yes we met our objective and yes this method was successful. We will continue to track travel planner request as they are an excellent indicator of the number of potential visitors to our area.
Continue Stage 2 of our Wayfinding Signage focusing on the 4 entrances to Red Lodge (78 West, 212 North and South, and 308 East).	Signs manufactured and installed will be our measurement for success.	No, we did not achieve this metric.	No, we did not meet our objective, but we know from our Phase 1 Wayfinding Signs being installed that this metric will be very successful. More details are provided within the narrative portion of the evaluation.
Increase lodging tax collections while improving the overall visitor experience.	Increase lodging tax collections for the DMO by 2% over FY23 collections, while improving the overall visitor experience.	Yes, our lodging tax collections increased well over 2% from FY23 to FY24. We were also successful in improving the visitor experience with updated restrooms, new brochures with Leave No Trace messaging, as well as adding LED lighting in our 24 hour brochure room.	Yes, we met our objective and yes, the method was successful. Our lodging tax collections were up 19% from FY23 to FY24.

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## DMO Budget

Allowable Methods	Amount Budgeted	% of Budget Allocated	Amount Expended	% of Budget Expended
Administration	\$9,160.00	14.07	\$8,636.00	94.3
Agency Services	\$4,900.00	7.53	\$4,900.00	100.0
Earned Media/Tourism Sales	\$750.00	1.15	\$329.00	43.9
Education/Outreach	\$3,750.00	5.76	\$3,479.00	92.8
Joint Venture	\$6,036.00	10.81	\$5,500.00	91.1
Opportunity Marketing	\$100.00	0.15	\$0.00	0
Paid Media	\$16,535.00	20.99	\$17,654.00	106.8
Product Development	\$11,748.00	23.11	\$6,399.00	54.5
Travel/Trade Shows	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
Visitor Services	\$12,116.00	16.43	\$11,116.00	91.7
	\$65,095.00	100.00	\$58,013.00	

## Narrative Evaluation

The Red Lodge Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) executed a successful marketing plan for FY24, which focused on three key tactics: promoting seasonal events and activities, showcasing warm-weather adventures unique to our area (historic town, foodie paradise, wildlife viewing, scenic ride/drives, camping, biking, hiking, star gazing and world class fishing), and enhancing the visitor experience through improved information (updated brochures/travel planner, restroom refresh) and additional Wayfinding signage.

Made possible through the Joint Venture program, we were able to participate in a combination of targeted digital and print advertising campaigns with Yellowstone Country and Windfall. These joint ventures are crucial to leveraging our reach to more high value/low impact visitors that we typically would not be able to market to due to our limited budget. We also advertised in Southeast Montana magazine which has a distribution of over 80,000 copies and an estimated readership of 230,000, Cody Enterprise (distributed in 7 different states including Montana, Wyoming, N Dakota, S Dakota, Idaho, Utah and Nebraska), American Road (audience of over 100,000 readers) and Road Runner Magazine (readership of around 250,000 who use RR to plan their vacation each year). We kept our Agency Services, which ensured our advertising was high quality and eye-catching. These opportunities directly impact our Objective/Method of increasing travel planner requests which was a very successful Obj/Method. Those requests were up by 893 total requests (3082 in FY24 over 2189 in FY23).

In addition to these Joint Venture opportunities, we were able to identify 2 new locations for the Phase II Wayfinding signs (original locations were lost during flooding in 2022) and successfully negotiate with Montana Department of Transportation, City of Red Lodge, and Carbon County for the installation of these signs at those locations. This was a

huge win for us and although no signs were installed, it is a step forward in the progress of Phase II of this project. However, due to the fact the signs were not installed as anticipated, this was not a successful Objective/Method for us, but we know based on research and the success of our Phase I Wayfinding project that this collaborative effort will result in better signage at critical points of entry and throughout the area, making it easier for visitors to navigate and discover local attractions, making it a future successful Objective/Method.

The Red Lodge DMO had a notable increase in lodging tax collections, which reflects the area's growing appeal as a tourist destination due to the marketing of our area. Over the past year, lodging tax revenue rose by 19% in FY24 compared to FY23. We attribute this growth to targeted marketing campaigns (Joint Venture and our partnership with the Red Lodge TBID) and the popularity of specific annual events in Red Lodge such as Red Lodge Christmas Stroll, Red Lodge Car Show, Montana Renaissance Festival, Songwriters Festival, Home of Champions Rodeo and Beartooth Rally. All these events saw record attendance numbers.

Our visitor center assisted over 5,000 visitors with varying levels of needs and questions. #1 being, is the Beartooth Highway open? #2, do you have a bathroom? and #3, what hikes do you recommend? We wanted to improve the visitor experience by providing consistent, clear, and concise area information. We were also able to make updates to our visitor restrooms and add LED lighting to our 24-hour brochure room. Providing accurate, clear/concise information as well as a welcoming environment will not only encourage visitors to plan return visits, but also is one of the top compliments we receive at the visitor center. In FY24, we saw visitors from all 50 states and a definite return of our international travelers (Canada is back!) who listed seeing the TV show Yellowstone as the reason they chose to come to Montana, but in researching where to go in Montana, they noted the Beartooth Highway as a "must do" experience. From there, they found Red Lodge to be their choice of towns to stay in based on the wide variety of activities offered in the area. We heard the term "charming town" often. After Canada, France and the UK were the top international points of origin documented on our Visitor Information sheets.

The Red Lodge DMO attended all TAC meetings in FY24 both in person (Anaconda-October, Billings-June and online (February) as well as attending the 2024 Governor's Conference in Missoula and the DMO director attending various meetings with our region, Yellowstone Country. These in person meetings are especially important to staying connected, feeling supported, and sharing ideas. Online meetings do not provide an easy platform for this connection and sharing. Education is a critical component of our plan and will continue to remain a top priority so we can stay informed on trends happening in tourism.

Our ENews subscribers grew by 595 contacts in FY24. We have an open rate of 41% which is 6% above the industry average. E-newsletters are a vital tool for the Red Lodge DMO, playing a key role in its efforts to promote the town and engage both potential and returning visitors. In the digital age, e-newsletters provide a direct and cost-effective way to connect with a targeted audience, delivering timely updates, event information, and travel inspiration straight to subscribers' inboxes. This type of communication allows the Red Lodge DMO to maintain a consistent and personalized connection with individuals who have already expressed interest in the area, ensuring they are kept informed about seasonal events, promotions, new attractions, and local highlights. Ultimately, e-newsletters are an essential component of the Red Lodge DMO's broader marketing plan, helping to drive visitation, support local businesses, and promote the town's distinctive character year-round.

In conclusion, the Red Lodge Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) has made significant strides in its FY24 marketing efforts, positioning Red Lodge as a key destination for regional, out-of-state and international travelers. Through a combination of targeted print and digital campaigns, strategic partnerships, and local event promotion there was an increase in lodging tax collections. The rise in travel planner requests demonstrates the growing interest in Red Lodge, signaling that the DMO's outreach and promotional strategies are resonating with travelers seeking a distinctive, year-round Montana experience.

Additionally, the successful negotiations with the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the City/County of Red Lodge to install new wayfinding signage marks a crucial advancement in our effort to move forward with Phase



It of our Wayfinding project. The updated signage will help guide visitors to key attractions and businesses, it also improves the overall visitor experience. This in turn enhances the economic impact of tourism in Red Lodge. This collaboration reflects the DMO's proactive approach to ensuring that Red Lodge remains accessible and easy to navigate for both new and returning visitors.

Looking ahead, the Red Lodge DMO is well-positioned to build on the momentum gained in FY24. By continuing to leverage data-driven marketing strategies, fostering community and business partnerships, and expanding its print and digital footprint, the DMO can further highlight Red Lodge's appeal as a premier Montana destination. As tourism continues to be a vital economic driver, the DMO's ongoing efforts will ensure the sustainable growth of Red Lodge's tourism sector, benefiting the local community and economy for years to come.

## ***DMO Plan Attachments***

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**Description**

**File Name**

**File Size**