



## State Tribal Economic Development Commission

301 S. Park Ave., Rooms 226 and 228

Helena, MT 59620

9:14 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Feb. 11, 2025

The official meeting minutes may be accessed on the recording.

**Commissioners Present:** Gerald Gray (Chair), Richard Sangrey, Misty Kuhl

**Commissioners Present Virtually:** Delina Cuts The Rope, Bryce Kirk, Mark Blasdel and Paul Green

**Montana Department of Commerce Staff Present:** Mackenzie Espeland, Rachelle Brown, Marilyn Willson and T.J. Altekruise

### **Guests Present:**

- Tash Wisemiller, Monda Schwartz and Monda Schwartz of USDA Rural Development
- Sarah Sadowski and Anastasia Matheison of Serve Montana

### **Guests Present Virtual:**

- Fawn Zimmerman and Elise Adelman of CDFA
- Janet Camel and Velda Shelby from CSKT
- Jonilee Running Fisher and Justin Old Chief, from OC Welding and Fabrication, LLC

- Nathan Chandler from Nate's Gona Fix It Inc.

### Call Meeting to Order

00:01 Chair Gray called the meeting to order.

00:39 Ms. Willson called the roll for Commission members.

02:12 No quorum established. Chair Gray continued the meeting noting they would not be voting on any items without a quorum.

### Opening Prayer

02:33 Commissioner Sangrey

### Welcome

03:05 Chair Gray welcomed everyone to the meeting.

### Public Comment on Non-Agenda Items

03:20 Chair Gray requested public comment on non-agenda items.

03:28 Tash Wisemiller introduced himself along with Mona Schwartz and Janelle Egli with the USDA Rural Development.

### Approval of Minutes

18:22 Ms. Willson reported to the Chair and Commission that Commissioner Mark Blasdel and Commissioner Paul Green joined the meeting which now creates a quorum. A quorum was established.

18:32 Presenter: Chair Gray

Motion to approve: Commissioner Sangrey

Second: Commissioner Kirk

Chair Gray called for a vote: All yes. Motion passed.

### Commissioner Round Robin Discussion

05:01 Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated she wished she could be in attendance in person but was unable to due to the weather. She stated that the Fort Belknap Indian Community has the Hays Wellness Center construction project. They are working with the USDA Rural Development on a Hays emergency facility for volunteer fire and law enforcement located at the southern end of the reservation. Commissioner Cuts The Rope also indicated they are also in need of cleanup and renovations of their commodity warehouse. They have done a cost benefit analysis. They are looking to do some renovations and EPA cleanup on the building. Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated they are aware of the grant and loan projects the USDA offers but they had not made a firm decision on a funding plan yet.

07:08 Commissioner Kirk stated he wished he could be there in person, but due to the weather he is unable to. He stated the Fort Peck Assiniboine & Sioux Tribes are trying to figure out how to get some money for their commodity building. Commissioner Kirk would like the contact information of those attending from the USDA Rural Development to speak with them regarding this and the meat processing plant.

08:40 Commissioner Sangrey stated he met with all the directors of the Chippewa Cree Tribe's programs. They are meeting again today to develop a spending plan because of the uncertain climate and are not sure if there is going to be another shutdown or budget reduction. Commissioner Sangrey stated he is preparing for the worst but hoping for the best. Commissioner Sangery said the tribe is not going to spend their money. Their chairman will be going to Washington DC to testify at the Appropriations Committee in two weeks.

13:05 Chair Gray stated the Little Shell Chippewa Tribe are working on building a resort in Great Falls. It took two and half years to plan. He stated that studies support local tourism. The resort will feature a 200-room hotel, 30,000 square foot indoor water park, a bowling alley, a gaming facility and a 10,000 square foot conference center. It will provide 500 full-time jobs when it's being built and 430 good paying full-time jobs when it's operating. The tribe submitted an application to the Department of the Interior for gaming which could take two to four years to get approved.

20:23 Commissioner Green discussed possible opportunities to work with some of the tribes, for example the Choctaw Tribe in Oklahoma, to model some of what they are doing for economic development.

22:00 Commissioner Blasdel provided an update regarding broadband. The Department of Administration and the broadband team are ready to start negotiating the census block units in those areas to get broadband and work through to meet the July 1 deadline. Some of this is on hold due to the federal freezes.

03:53:38 Commissioner Kuhl stated there are a few pieces of legislation the Commission may be interested in. One being a bill introduced by Representative Tracy Sharp which would allow hunting on fee land on the reservation. There is another bill where Lake County is asking for 2.5 million dollars a year to fund law enforcement. Another bill would prohibit the state from entering into any agreement with tribes. Also, another bill would prohibit the State from entering into any land exchanges with tribes.

Commissioner Kuhl stated the main priorities of the Indian Caucus this session is Medicaid expansion, education, Indigenous People's Day and ICWA.

Commissioner Kuhl also stated the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders' Council will be meeting on Feb. 25, 2025, at the Double Tree in Helena.

### CDFA's Community Facilities Technical Assistance for Tribal Communities Program

24:20 Fawn Zimmerman provided information about the Council of Development Finance Agencies. Elise Adelman with CDFA also joined the meeting virtually. They accept two applications per year, and they have one more opening for technical assistance through this program funding. CDFA is a non-profit, membership-based trade association. They are dedicated to advancing development finance industry, development finance agencies across the country. CDFA has been around for over 40 years. They hold in-person and virtual events throughout the year.

CDFA offers education, advocacy, research, resources and networking. USDA Tribal Community Facilities Technical Assistance Program is the combination of CDFA's development finance network with support from private sector partners. There are four components to this program. These components include the Direct Technical Assistance, Tribal Finance Resource Center, Tribal Communities Project Marketplace (to be launched late March or early April) and Tribal Finance Webinar Series (to take place in September). Fawn Zimmerman can be reached at 614-705-1305 and by email at [fzimmerman@cdfa.net](mailto:fzimmerman@cdfa.net). Elise Adelman can be reached at 614-705-1318 and by email at [eadelmann@cdfa.net](mailto:eadelmann@cdfa.net).

### CSKT's Meat Processing Plant Federal Grant Received

48:04 Janet Camel and Velda Shelby discussed the federal grant CSKT received for their meat processing plant. CSKT worked with the US Economic Development Administration to plan every five years to put out an official strategy. CSKT works

in the agriculture industry and assists their cattle producers as well. They also focus on food sovereignty efforts. In 2021, the tribal council adopted a guiding resolution which focused on eradicating hunger on the reservation. In 2022, they commissioned Raven Consulting to conduct their feasibility study to develop a mobile meat processing plant or unit that didn't turn out to be feasible. Then, Raven Consulting also developed a business plan to operate a USDA inspected plant.

In 2023, the Tribe's EDO worked with the Mission West Community Development Project and the MSU extension services to apply for the USDA Indigenous Animals Harvesting and Processing Grant, known as the IG Grant. In 2024, they were awarded \$7.65 million dollars to develop the meat processing plant and compost facility which will be located in Ronan. Ms. Camel has coordinated the technical and detailed design plans. The construction will begin this year.

Ms. Camel stated the feasibility study and business plan came from value added producers grant with the USDA. Ms. Camel noted the Department of Commerce awarded them a grant to help pay for the office building for their plant.

Ms. Camel stated they are working with their local cattle producers who are concerned about not getting a good price for their cattle. They are also worried about climate issues, shipping cattle to the Midwest, concerned about the fuel of going back and forth and people want to see local sources of meat and especially grass-fed meat. They work with multiple agencies. Ms. Camel stated the purpose of this project is they wanted value added revenue for the producers, food security, new living wage jobs, locally grown, value added meat products, compost for farming and forest regeneration and future revenue for CSKT. They are also using indigenous and temple Grandin humane handling practices which are incorporated into the plant design and operation. So, the plant is more

expensive than originally anticipated. Ms. Camel discussed the site plan. They are hoping to open the plant in January of next year.

### OICED Program Update

1:14:45 Mr. Altekruise provided an OICED update. He introduced Bryan Singer the Entrepreneur Development Specialist.

Commissioner Sangrey asked when the NABA contracts end. Mr. Altekruise stated the contracts had just been recently signed. Mr. Altekruise stated the contracts would end later in the year but didn't have the exact date.

Commissioner Sangrey has concerns regarding the NABA for Rocky Boy as he felt he hasn't served his purpose and hasn't come out to visit Rocky Boy. Mr. Altekruise said we could get the STED Commission input before the renewal of the NABAs. Mr. Altekruise stated he and Bryan can identify and rectify issues as quickly as possible if there are areas the NABA isn't meeting. Mr. Altekruise said he would contact the NABA to make sure they were visiting Rocky Boy and have better communication.

Mr. Altekruise provided an update regarding the FY25 Tribal Business Development Grant. The Blackfeet Tribe was awarded \$89,400 for the Buffalo Program located in Browning. The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribe was awarded \$150,600 for the Meat Processing Office and Retail Modular Unit located in Ronan.

Commissioner Sangrey stated he thought the TBDG was going to go around to all the tribes. Mr. Altekruise stated that the TBDG is posted publicly and available to all tribes to apply for. Mr. Altekruise stated that they must review the applications that have been received. A total of three applications for the TBDG

were received from CSKT, Blackfeet and Little Shell. Mr. Altekruise stated that maybe there is a lack of communication or knowledge on how to apply for this grant, which may be a reason why other tribes are not applying for the grant. Mr. Altekruise said that perhaps this is something that needs to be looked into.

Chair Gray stated that at the STED Commission meeting in Havre, he remembered, discussing rotating the TBDG and the tribe that received it couldn't apply for two years. He wanted to know if OICED was getting away from that idea. Ms. Brown stated that perhaps the minutes could be reviewed of the Havre meeting as she did not recall what Chair Gray stated. Mr. Altekruise stated that we haven't received applications from other tribes for the grant. Chair Gray suggested that we reach out to the tribe to see if they are interested in applying for the grant, and if not, move on to the next tribe to ask the same. Ms. Brown stated that refining the guidelines and discussing how this program should be administered with consultation with the STEDC should be done to ensure the guidelines are meeting what was discussed in Havre two years ago. Chair Gray and Commissioner Sangrey would like to have the TBDG on May 8, 2025, STEDC agenda.

Mr. Altekruise provided an Indian Equity Fund and NABA update. The Indian Equity Fund application deadline was Sept. 30, 2024. There was a total of 123 Indian Equity Fund applications. The NABAs performed an initial local review. They each identified their top five applications. The top 40 applications were reviewed by the internal Commerce review team during the week of Jan. 27, 2025. Mr. Altekruise stated we had to extend the review process to ensure there's eligibility. Once that is complete, award letters and unfunded letters will be sent to the applicants. Mr. Altekruise stated he hopes to have contracts commenced by late February.



**HB 19**

01:35:39 Mr. Altekruze discussed House Bill 19. He reviewed the language of the bill (now law). Mr. Altekruze stated he wanted to speak more about the bill and what the Commission's interpretation of what the bill means and what collecting the data would look like. Mr. Altekruze posed three questions:

What does it mean to quantify on an ongoing basis?

What data already exists that could potentially be accepted as "Contributions and donations"?

What defines "economic impact" and "economic contributions"?

Commissioner Sangrey stated that his tribe's economy receives a lot of grants and contracts. He said that he believes that 90 percent goes into Hill County and the economic impact is that dollars that are contributed to that turns over seven times before it leaves.

Commissioner Cuts The Ropes stated that she believed that most tribes, or at least Fort Belknap, carry a community economic development strategies document, which is a living document, is formed and based on your tribal leadership's strategic plan. This document is updated about every four years due to changes in tribal administration and councils. She continued that you could measure things like economic development partnerships you could describe quantifiable things. She also stated you could document and measure within a certain time frame so you would have something to compare it to. Commissioner Cuts The Rope stated she would be able to share Fort Belknap's CEDS report for a 12-month period and maybe show a comparison of two or three years.

Chairman Gray stated his tribe is also participating in the Federal Reserve survey which is collecting that data which may be helpful.

### Serve Montana

01:48:25 Sarah Sadowski introduced herself along with Anastasia Matheison, Administrative Specialist with the Governor's Office of Community Service or Serve Montana. Ms. Sadowski explained their office is based in Helena and they are a state service commission set up in 1994 under the National Community Service Act. So, they are set up to receive federal funds and create AmeriCorps. There are over 55,000 people in AmeriCorps serving our country and almost 800 of them served in Montana last year. Ms. Sadowski presented on the different programs offered by Serve Montana.

### FY 2020 Indian Equity Fund Recipient

02:36:56 Jonilee Running Fisher and Justin Old Chief, from OC Welding and Fabrication, LLC, presented on the Fiscal Year 2020 Indian Equity Fund Grant she received and shared how the grant has helped her business. Mr. Old Chief was a mobile welder only because he did not have a shop. They used the grant funds to build a 60-by-80 shop with 16-foot walls and radiant heated floors located in East Glacier Park, Montana. This allowed them to fit a lot of projects inside which helped the welding business significantly. Mr. Old Chief is the only certified aluminum welder on the reservation.

### FY 2020 Indian Equity Fund Recipient

03:03:56 Nathan Chandler from Nate's Gona Fix It Inc. presented on his award of the Fiscal Year 2020 Indian Equity Fund Grant and shared how the grant helped his business. With the IEF Grant, they were able to purchase two vehicle hoists which increased their capacity to get more jobs done more safely and efficiently. This also allowed them to hire one more employee. They have hired several employees since receiving the grant. Currently, they have two full-time technicians and a part-time technician. Mr. Chandler's wife is a service advisor and bookkeeper.

### Native American Trade Mission to Paris

03:15:54 Angelyn DeYoung, International Trade Manager for the Department of Commerce, provided an update to the Native American Trade Mission to Paris. Ms. DeYoung stated her job is to help Montana businesses sell outside the U.S. They do that with technical support, grant funds and take the businesses to trade shows and trade missions to expose them to the new markets.

Tally Monteau from TRIIA discussed with Ms. DeYoung last year that there were a couple of Montana native businesses who were invited and attended fashion week in Paris, but didn't have business meetings. The discussion between Ms. Monteau and Ms. DeYoung was what they can do to help businesses in the future. After brainstorming, they came up with the idea of putting together a trade mission for Native American artists. After talking to the contractor about the pilot project, they narrowed the scope of the mission to just fashion. There are currently six confirmed businesses which include Designs by Della (Della Stump), Laughing Water Designs (Alisa Herodes), Plains Soul (Carrie Moran McCleary), Rebeka Jarvey, Courtney Little Axe and Brocade Designs (Brocade Black Eagle). Ms. DeYoung stated they are confirmed and excited about this business trip.

Ms. DeYoung says she is working with a contractor based in France. They are first doing an onboarding process where each of the six companies will meet one on one over TEAMS with the contractor so the contractor can get to know their business and what their goals and the contractor can help initiate appropriate contacts. The contractor will then make cold calls and return with a curated list of meetings for the companies. Ms. DeYoung will be meeting with the businesses for the travel planning piece. The Office of Indian Country

Economic Development has contributed funds to assist with this work trip for these businesses. The trip is scheduled for the first week of June 2025.

### Tribal Tourism Update

03:33:20 Rachelle Brown provided the Tribal Tourism update. Ms. Brown reminded the Commission that the goals of the Tribal Tourism Program is to elevate the brand, expand opportunities and inspire visitation. The Department of Commerce launched a new website this past year. The Tribal Tourism Program page views increased 41 percent and ranked number eight on the Business MT page views. Ms. Brown also explained there were over 43,000 guidebooks ordered by customers or distributed.

Ms. Brown discussed the upcoming International indigenous Tourism Conference being held on Feb. 25-27, 2025. Different circumstances have created difficulties for some of the commissioners and delegates attending the conference. There will be three people attending which include Pat Doyle for Paul Green, Lailani Upham for Misty Kuhl and Marie Torosian for Jennifer Finley. Ms. Brown asked for guidance from the Commission regarding possibly using that funding that can be refunded to place in a pool of money and divided equally by eight to add to the Tribal Tourism Historic Preservation Contracts. The Commission supported that idea.

Ms. Brown reminded the Commission of the upcoming Made in Montana Tradeshow and that the Native American Made in Montana Pavilion will be in the tradeshow. There will be three vendors which include MT Sue's Creations, Shop LS574, and Roots & Shoots.

Ms. Brown stated the Montana Department of Commerce Governor's Conference on Tourism will be held at the Delta Hotel in Helena on April 27-29, 2025.

Ms. Brown stated there is going to be a relaunch of the Production Assistance Training Scholarship Program. There have been 29 graduates, and at least six of those graduates have worked on active productions since becoming certified. Jordan Lefler and Scott Smoker will be helping to create the new video products and guidebooks. Ms. Brown also stated she is working with the tribes on creating tribal tourism working groups. She has met with three tribes and has five more to meet with. Ms. Brown explained this is still in progress and will be requesting more time to ensure consultation.

Ms. Brown discussed the Tribal Tourism Small Business Grant for 2025. It is currently under review for award recommendations. There is a total of \$240,000 in funding available with approximately 24 awards of \$10,000 each. Ms. Brown stated there have been 23 submissions received.

Ms. Brown explained there is \$65,200 to each nation for the Tribal Tourism Historic Preservation Sponsorship Contracts which are now in the legal review process.

Ms. Brown stated there were three submissions for the Tribal Tourism Grant which are currently under review. She stated that awards and contracts are expected in late March.

03:51:04 Mackenzie Espeland provided information regarding legislation. SB90 to redistribute certain tax revenue to primary tax relief and what it did in its original form is effectively pull all of Commerce's accommodations funding. There was a hearing a few weeks ago having strong opposition to the bill in that form, so there was a proposed amendment. The amendment moved forward, and, at this point, it restored all of Commerce's funding.

Ms. Espeland stated Commerce had their budget presentation on Feb. 6, 2025, for all Commerce's programs to the Appropriations Committee.

4:09:14 At this time in the meeting, there wasn't a quorum. **The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. by Chair Gray.**