

CARBON COUNTY  
MONTANA

GROWTH POLICY 2020

DRAFT

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This growth policy was made possible by the contributions and cooperative input from numerous citizen participants, local stakeholders, county and city staff members, and elected and appointed officials. The project team thanks all those that participated, including the following:

### **Carbon County Commission**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

This growth policy will provide decision makers with a resource for balancing diverse goals while creating a more vibrant, sustainable community. It is also the voice of local residents and formalizes how they want the County to grow in the future.

This plan is intended to be easily understood by the local citizenry and used as an educational tool on the county's broad land use issues and opportunities. It aims to simplify, clarify, and update previous versions of the Growth Policy where necessary. It is a plan for the future focusing primarily on the physical and economic issues pertinent in our County.

## **Local Planning History**

Carbon County's first Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 1978 and operated as the community's guiding document for over twenty years. When Montana's state planning statute was updated in 1999, the County followed suit by adopting a growth policy in 2003. The Growth Policy was updated in 2009 and 2015. This update will keep many of the elements of the 2015 version, with updates where necessary to ensure accurate data and community goals and objectives.

The terms growth policy and comprehensive plan are sometimes used synonymously and each represent valuable tools for consensus-based policy planning and community development.

## **Plan Approach and Methods**

The first phase of plan development involved data collection, identifying local population and housing outlooks, and an analysis of existing conditions. This included preparing maps and graphs relative to each topic to discover and provide visualization of trends among the various communities.

The second phase of plan development consisted of public input opportunities spread across the County. This is a necessary and important part in developing and public policy. This gave public officials and consultants invaluable guidance on citizen's preferences, and was also informative for community members. To this end, meetings were held in, Bearcreek, Bridger, Fromberg, and Joliet in coordination with Town Council meetings. Monthly County Planning Board meetings also allowed for public comment and discussion. An online survey was developed and disseminated to as many people as possible to ensure large participation in the development of the policy. Periodic press releases to the Carbon County News also kept the public informed of the process.

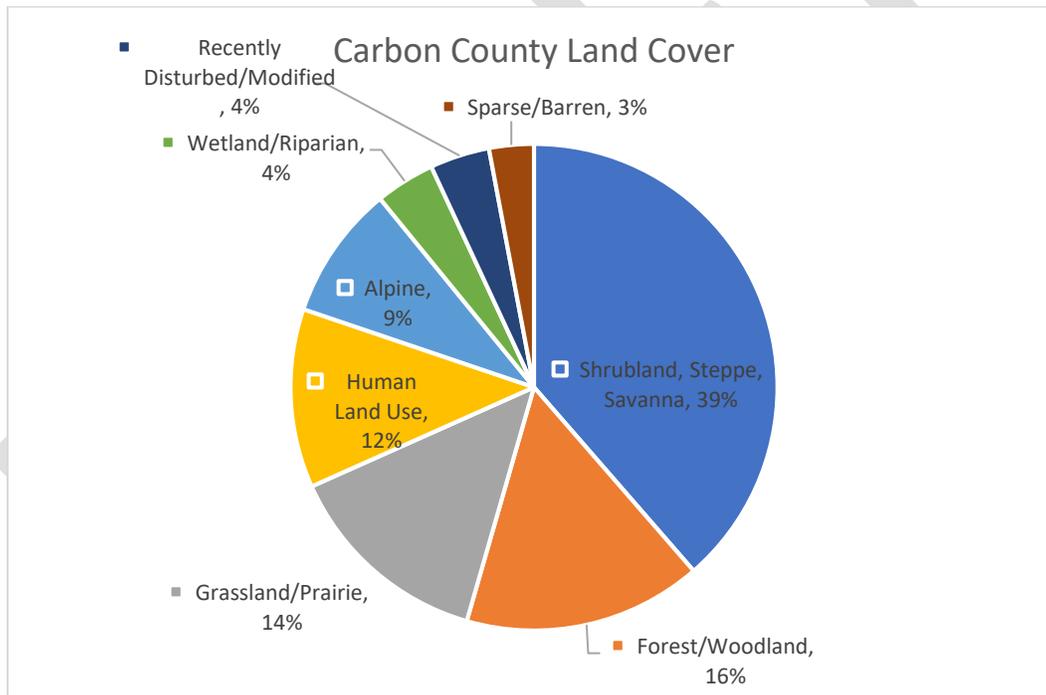
The final phase of plan development was publicizing the draft growth policy to gather final comments and feedback. The Planning Board held a public hearing on the draft Growth Policy, after which a recommendation was made to the County Commission to adopt the document. After a resolution of intent, the County officially adopted the 2020 Growth Policy.

# 2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

## Land Use

The majority of land in Carbon County (47%) is in public use by the Bureau of Land Management, State of Montana, National Park Service or other agencies. Various uses, including livestock grazing, recreation, logging or habitat conservation occur on these lands.

The dominant land cover is Shrubland, Steppe, and Savanna systems, encompassing 39% of land within the County. Forest and Woodland systems, consisting mostly of conifer forests, comprise about 16% of the County, while Grasslands comprise about 14%. About 12% of land is classified as Human use, which includes agricultural uses such as cultivated crops and pasture land (10%), developed land (about 2%), and mining and resource extraction (<1%). Alpine systems cover about 9% of land in the County. Wetland and Riparian land encompassed about 4% of land, as does Recently Disturbed or Modified lands (including recently burned, insect-killed forest, and harvested forest). Sparse and Barren systems cover about 3% of the County. (Source: Montana Natural Heritage Program).



## Land Ownership

All of the land in the county was included in the Crow Reservation until 1877, when a small area around Red Lodge was withdrawn for coal development. In 1882 and 1892 agreements with the Crow Tribe opened additional lands for settlement. Carbon County was formed in 1895 from portions of Park and Yellowstone counties.

The lands now in private ownership passed at one time from federal ownership primarily by means of homestead and mineral entry. Approximately 53% of the county is privately-owned. Privately-owned lands in the county are generally situated along the Clarks Fork and Rock Creek Valley bottoms and in the north county. The lands in private ownership are generally lower in elevation, more level, drier, and have more productive soils than publicly owned lands.

Both the Custer and Gallatin National Forests manage land in Carbon County. The majority of the land is managed by the Custer Forest. The Forest Service lands are concentrated in two blocks. The largest block is situated to the south, west and northwest of Red Lodge, in the southwestern corner of the county. This block of forest land is high in elevation and rugged in character, containing a portion of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area. Forest Plan management direction for land uses along the mountain front and wilderness area includes; grazing, wildlife habitat, water quality, multiple use, interpretation along the Beartooth Scenic Byway, and promoting the wild character. The second block of National Forest lands are located on the southeast flank of the Pryor Mountains. The Forest Plan guidance on uses for the Pryor lands include; grazing, wildlife habitat, wood products, and recommended wilderness. The Forest Service lands are primarily managed from the Beartooth Ranger District located in Red Lodge.

#### Land Development Patterns

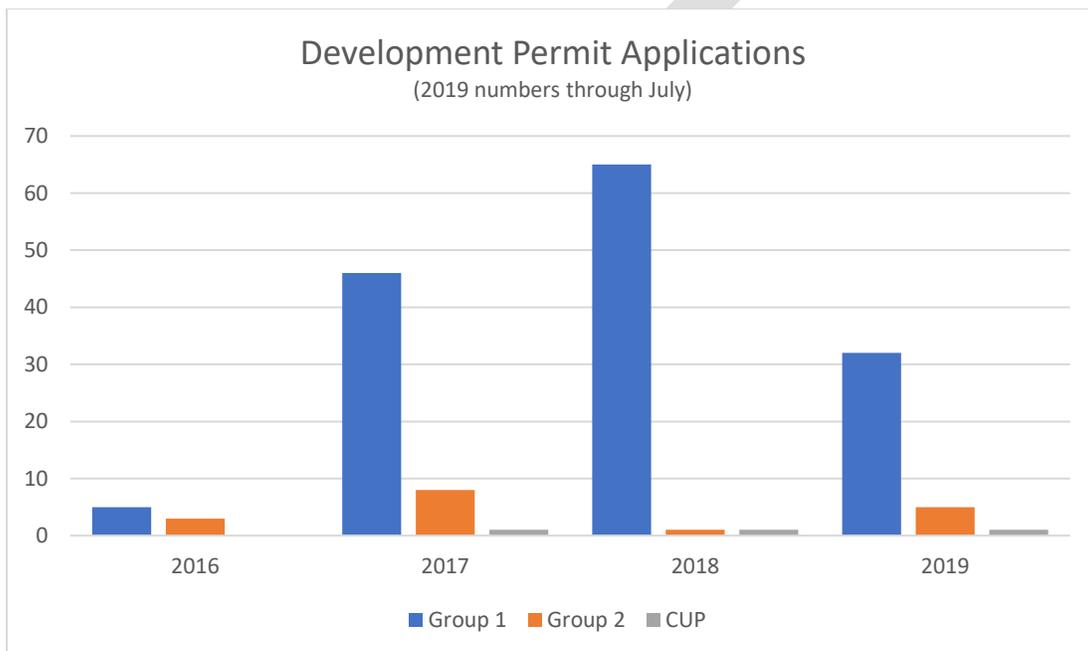
Platted subdivisions outside of incorporated places in the county cover approximately 12,000 acres. The county contains five incorporated cities and towns (Bearcreek, Bridger, Fromberg, Joliet, and Red Lodge) with an area of about 2,700 acres. There are also several unincorporated communities including Belfry, Boyd, Edgar, Luther, Roberts, Rockvale, Roscoe, and Silesia. Most of the subdivided areas of the county – approximately 80% of the land area – reside outside of an incorporated city or town, giving the county a large role and responsibility in providing government services. A number of communities that once existed are no longer inhabited. These communities are listed in the history section of the county's 1986 comprehensive plan.

The dominant development pattern in the County continues to be the widespread subdivision of land along Highway 212, largely between Red Lodge and Joliet. While there are fewer large subdivisions being proposed than there were 10-15 years ago, an emerging development pattern is the increasing one- or two-lot subdivisions dispersed throughout the county. Also, the use of divisions of land exempt from subdivision review, such as family transfers, create development that has an impact on development patterns, as well as local services, but is not required to meet the typical standards or conditions associated with subdivision review.

The county planning board has representation from each of the five incorporated communities, the Conservation District, and a member representing each of the three commissioner districts in the county. When a subdivision application that does not meet the summary review provisions is received by the county, the county prepares a staff report and the county planning board reviews the report. A public hearing is required for major subdivisions (subdivision creating six or more lots, or subdivisions of previously subdivided lots). The planning board then makes one of three possible recommendations to the commissioners, approve the preliminary plat, approve the preliminary plat with conditions, or deny the preliminary plat.

Exempt subdivisions do not go before the Planning Board or County Commissioners and may be decided administratively by the Planning Director.

In July 2016 the County adopted Development Regulations which require the issuance of a Group 1 Development Permit prior to new residential construction, a Group 2 Development Permit prior to new commercial construction or new commercial activity, and a Conditional Use Permit prior to certain activities not defined as a Group 2 use, such as wind energy development, oil and gas exploration, and shooting ranges. Applications for Development Permits have increased every year since adoption, and while not all of these were approved, and some of these have been amendments to previously approved permits, this trend is expected to continue as people become more familiar with the development permit process and aware of the necessity of applying for the permit.



### Farmland

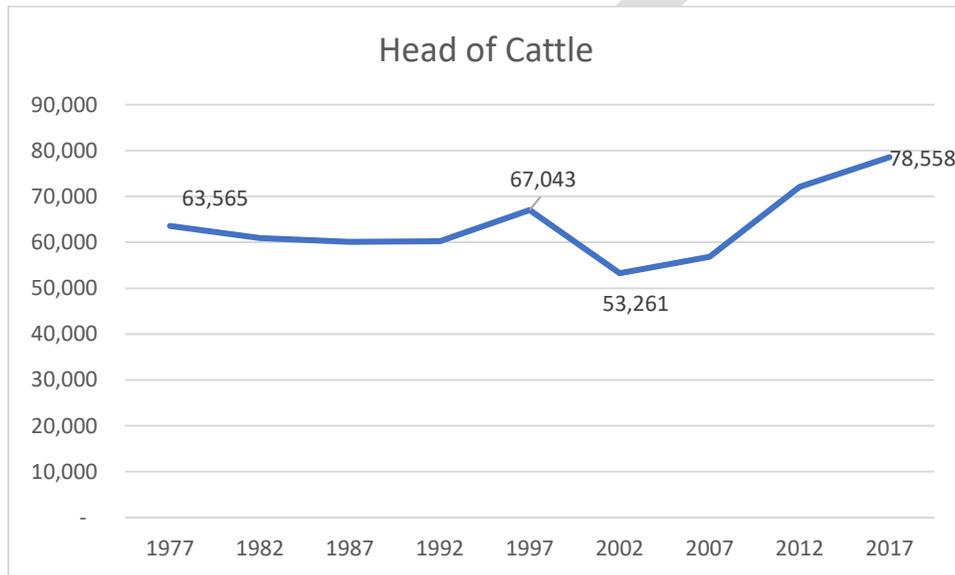
According to the 2017 USDA National Agriculture Census, the amount of land used for farming in 2017 was 815,758 acres, an increase of nearly 25,000 acres from 2012, reversing what had been a downward trend. The number of farms remained steady, going from 726 in 2012 to 725 in 2017. Corn, wheat, oats, barley, hay, and sugarbeets are major crops in the County.

Geographically, the largest acreage of farmland is near the confluence of Rock creek and the Clark's Fork of the Yellowstone. Flat alluvial soils here provide ideal conditions for growing sugar beets, corn, alfalfa and barley. Abundant farmland exists along the Clark's Fork valley, while some alfalfa and non-alfalfa hay is farmed in the Rock Creek valley.

## Livestock and Ranching

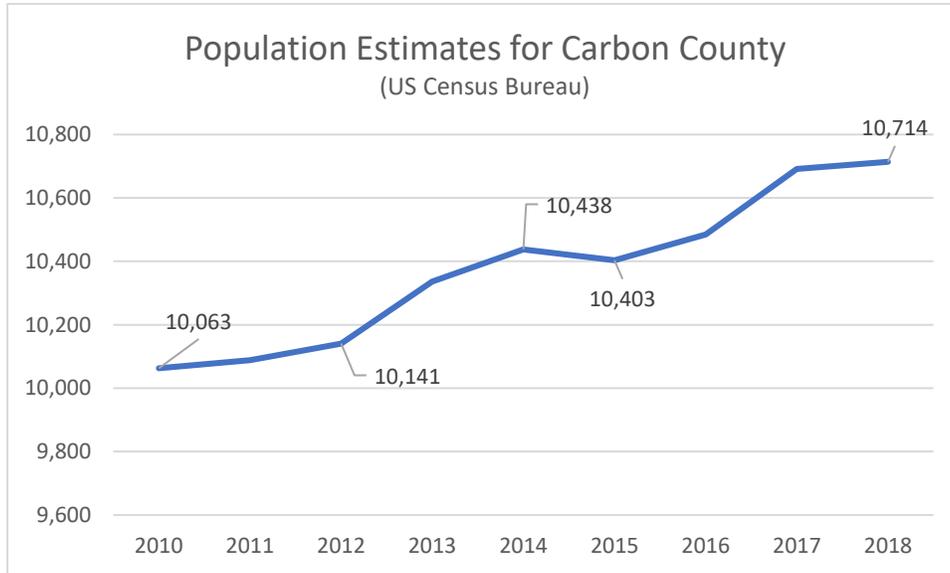
The climate and topography of Carbon County is ideal for ranching and livestock production, which is a significant component of the county's economy. Carbon County ranks 4th in the state for value in sales of cattle, and also has significant amounts of sheep and poultry productions.

Livestock production has fluctuated over the past 40 years, with number of cattle seeing the largest swings. According to the 2017 Agricultural Census, the County had a high of over 78,000 head. A historical low of 53,261 head of cattle was hit as recently as 2002. Sheep and hogs have seen a historic decline since the 1970s, with sheep currently at less than 7,000 head and hog inventories continuing to decline to only 154 animals in the latest census.

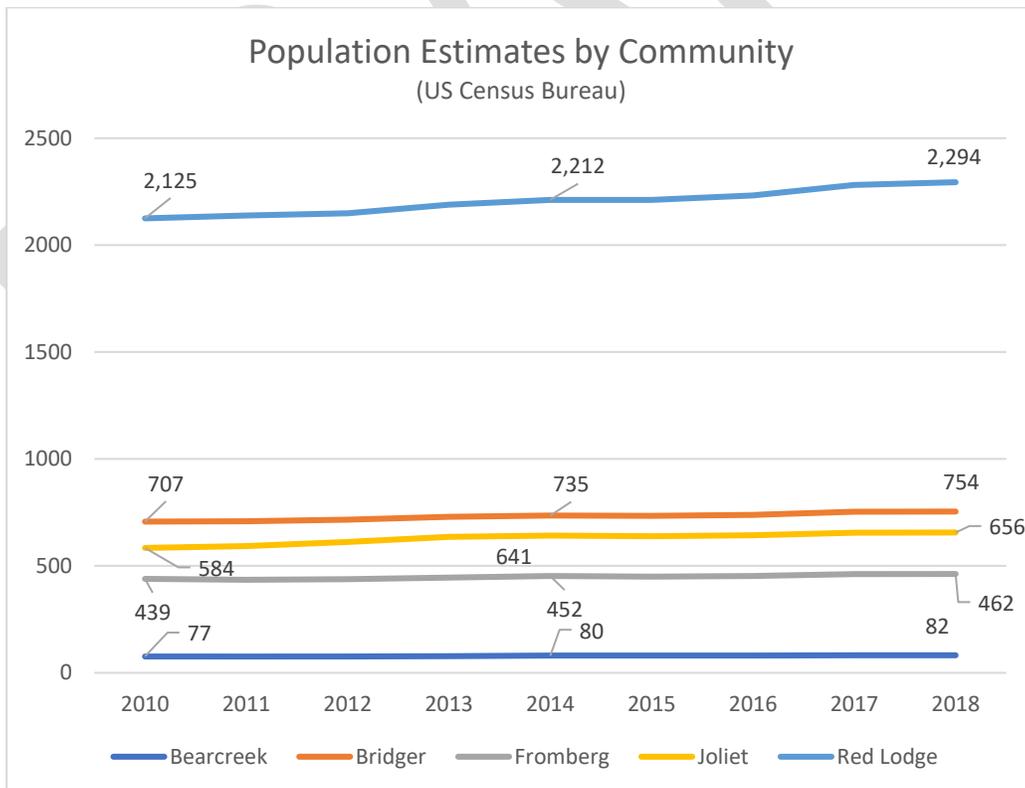


## People

Carbon County grew in population from 9,552 to 10,078 between the 2000 and 2010 census. This growth is expected to continue through the 2020 census. Population estimates continue to show a picture of a growing County population.



Cities and towns show similar growth to County, though Joliet stands out with an estimated 12% growth since the 2010 census.

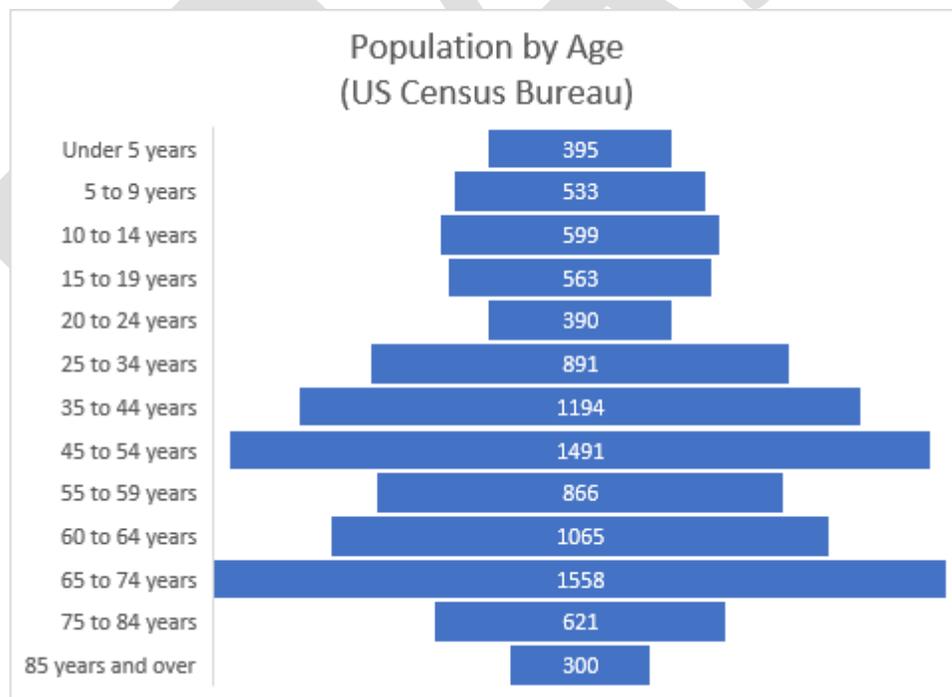


Rural and Urban Population

While incorporated areas are seeing growth, Carbon County is still a largely rural area. Over 60% of the County's population lives in unincorporated areas, which include the communities of Edgar, Luther, Roberts, Roscoe, and Silesia.

### Age and Gender

With an estimated median age of 50 in 2017, Carbon County is over ten years older than the rest of the state (39.8 years) and the US (37.8 years). The county's median family size of 2.74 also reflects the aging population when compared to the state (2.91), and the country (3.14), as older families generally do not have children in their households. The age and gender composition is not unlike other rural communities in the state and country. An aging population is illustrated in the County's population pyramid by large population between the ages of 45 and 74. This represents the baby boom generation, who typically are still working or near retirement. When this generation retires, there will be a significant change in demand for jobs and healthcare. A smaller bulge in school-aged children (ages 5 to 19 years) indicates a balance in the number of families and a potential younger workforce for the county. Conversely, there is a gap between the ages of 19 and 25, most likely meaning that the county's youth are leaving after completing high school or turning 18 as they seek employment or education elsewhere in the state or region. This lack of working-aged youths may indicate job opportunities or education is lacking in Carbon County.



### Racial Composition

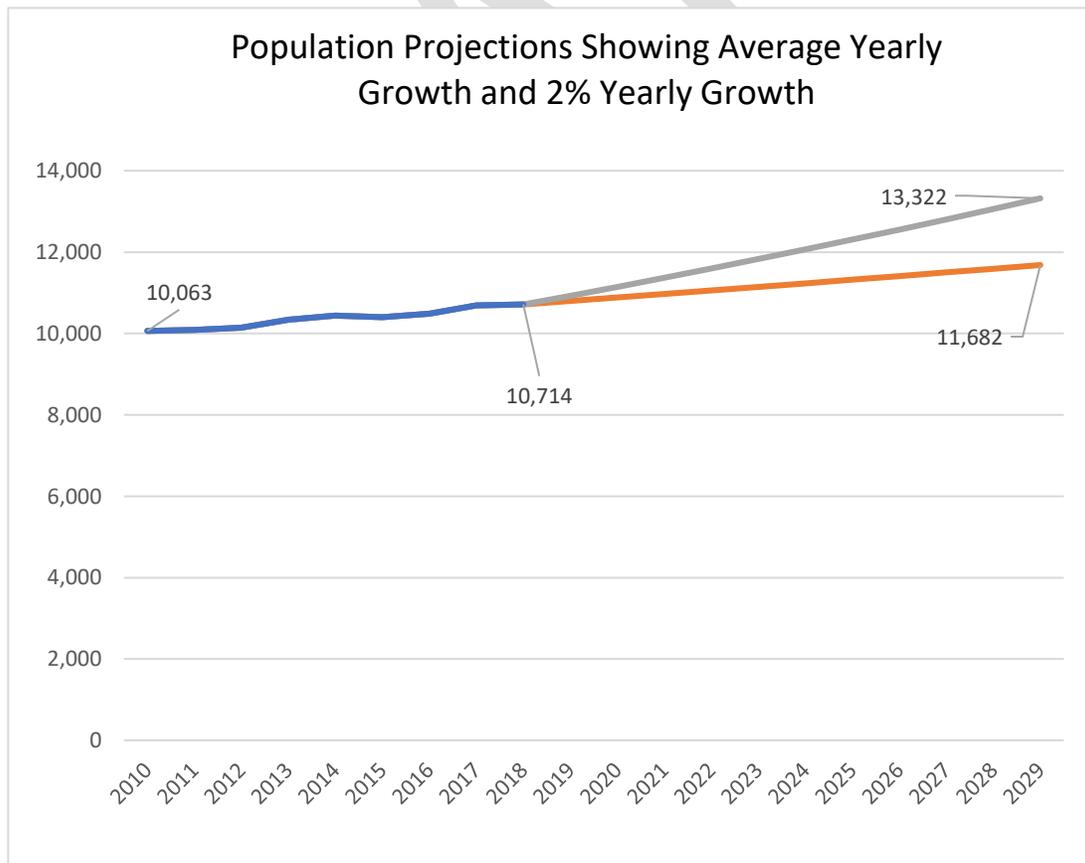
By 2017 estimates, the most prevalent race in Carbon County is White at 97%, with Hispanic or Latino the second largest at about 2.4%. American Indian and Alaska Native is third at 0.9%. These figures are similar to those found in the 2010 census and indicate Carbon County is slightly less racially diverse than the state as whole, which has a population that is 89% White, 3.6% Hispanic or Latino, and 6.5% American Indian and Alaska Native.

### School Enrollment

The Montana Office of Public Instruction provides enrollment numbers for schools in the county. Since the 1990s, total enrollment has steadily declined, with the largest losses in elementary students. High school student enrollment increased through the 2000s while many small elementary and K-12 schools were annexed or became inactive. Over the past decade school enrollment has mostly held steady County-wide.

### Population Projections

Carbon County has grown by about .79% per year, according to population estimates. If population growth continues at this level, the County can expect to add about 1000 more residents over the next decade. However, some years has seen higher growth rates, so a second projection is shown on the graph below assuming a 2% per year growth rate.



### **Housing**

Estimates from 2017 indicate there were 6,543 housing units in Carbon County, slightly up from 6,424 in 2012. A Housing Plan was developed in 2009 to inventory housing stock and to understand trends and issues in an effort to address needs. Housing trends were driven by migration from Clarks Fork valley communities to Red Lodge, Joliet and other places along the southern Highway 212 corridor. This left vacant, underutilized and unsound homes in cities and towns in the Clarks Fork valley. Many of the same issues of housing cost, condition and supply remain. As the population grows in every community in the county, demand for quality and affordable housing will increase.

The 2017 Census ACS provides estimates on the value, condition, supply and ownership of housing units.

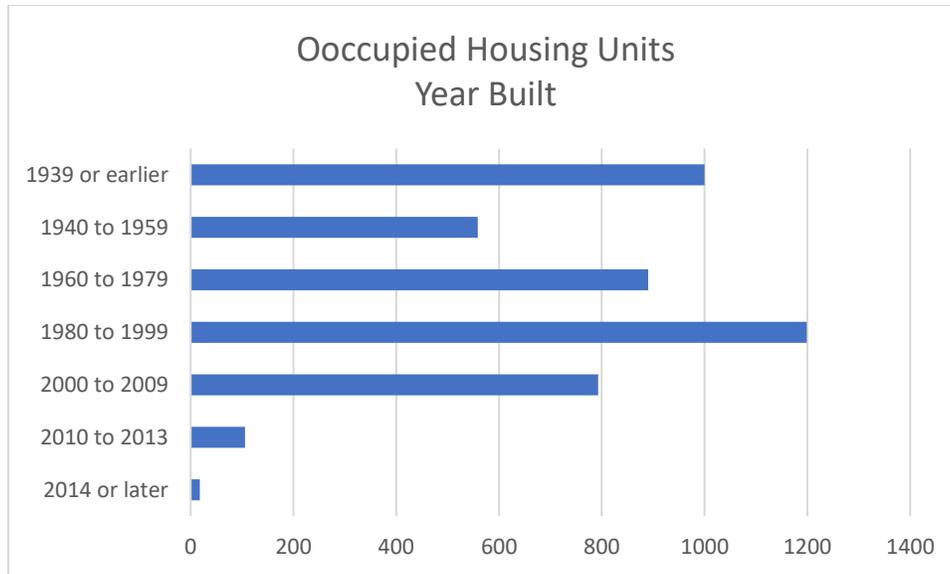
### Value

Median owner-occupied home value in Carbon County in 2017 was estimated at \$227,400, higher than the median home value in the state (\$209,100) and the US (\$193,500), and up over \$30,000 from 2012. Seventy-nine percent of occupied housing units are owner-occupied. In Carbon County, over half (52%) of owned housing units had a mortgage, with median monthly owner costs being \$1,319.

Median rent in the county was \$754, which is nearly identical to the state average (\$751), but lower than the US (\$982).

### Age and Condition

Most of the county's towns and cities developed in the late 19th and early 20th century, therefore nearly 22% of housing units in the county were built before 1939. A small building boom occurred in the 1970s. The most recent peak building decade was the 1990s when about 1,000 new units were constructed. The national housing boom of the 2000s is reflected in the 793 new units built in that decade, however there has been a significant slowdown in new home construction since 2010.



Thirty-eight occupied housing units lacked complete plumbing facilities, 42 units lacked complete kitchens and 116 units had no telephone service.

Many of Carbon County's citizens are new residents. Of all current householders, 37.5% moved into their home between 2000 and 2009, and 26.7% moved in from 2010 to 2014. Only a little over 10% percent of householders moved in before 1989. Since 2015, 267 new householders moved into their Carbon County home.

#### Composition

Of all housing units, 72% were two or three bedroom houses, and nearly 20% had four or more bedrooms. One bedroom houses made up the difference.

Carbon County's homes have many more cars per house than the state with 39% having three or more vehicles. Statewide this figure is 29% and only 20% of US homes have three or more vehicles available. Almost all of the county's housing units (98.8%) had one occupant per room. This indicates low density housing and a probable lack of multiple family dwellings.

#### Demand

One demand calculation uses the number of households compared to the number of housing units to produce an estimate of housing availability or vacancy rate. According to 2017 estimates, there were an estimated 4,565 occupied housing units and an estimated supply of 6,543 units. Of these, 1,978 units were vacant.

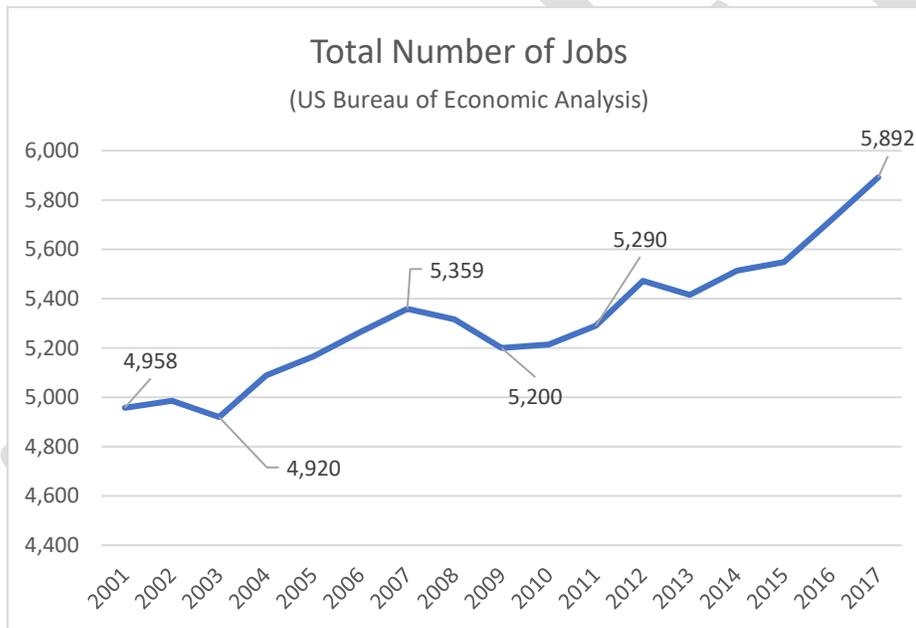
A "household" consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit. The average number of persons per household for an owner-occupied unit is 2.31, compared to 2.11 for a rental unit, both lower than the state average.

## Economy

### Sectors and Jobs

In 2017, the US Bureau of Economic Analysis reported there were 5,892 jobs in Carbon County, continuing an upward trend. The county's economy is evenly distributed among sectors, with management and administration (including government services) being the largest, supporting 21% of all jobs. Accommodation and Food Services is the second largest (17%), showing the importance of tourism for the local economy. Construction is the third largest sector, providing 9% of all jobs.

The economy has been shifting away from a reliance on agriculture. Since 2001, the agriculture sector has remained relatively static, recovering from a dip in the late 2000s, while non-farm employment has increased by nearly 1000 jobs, accounting for the growth over that timeframe. Real estate and rental and leasing is responsible for nearly 140 of those jobs, the largest increase of any sector, though accommodation and food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation, transportation, and construction have also added a significant number of jobs.



### Employers

The top private employers in the county are as follows (listed alphabetically, with employment range as provided by the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, 2018):

| <b>Business Name</b>                 | <b>Employment Range</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bank of Bridger                      | 20-49                   |
| Beartooth Hospital and Health Center | 100-249                 |
| Bogarts Restaurant                   | 20-49                   |

|                           |         |
|---------------------------|---------|
| Downing's IGA             | 20-49   |
| Montana Wildfire          | 20-49   |
| Pollard Hotel             | 20-49   |
| Red Lodge Healthcare      | 20-49   |
| Red Lodge Mountain Resort | 100-249 |
| Red Lodge Pizza Company   | 50-99   |
| Rock Creek Resort         | 20-49   |

### Income and Wages

Although employment is an important measure of economic activity, it does not tell the whole story. The health of the economy depends upon the vitality of industries bringing income into the area. Most often, these “basic” industries bring in revenues by “exporting” products or services. These exports can be manufactured goods, financial services, technology services, or any other number of activities that go far beyond the traditional sectors of mining, agriculture, and forest product industries that have been referred to as the “three-legged stool” or foundation of Montana’s economy. In addition to basic industries, other activities such as retirees living off their domestic stock portfolios also bring basic income into the area. Since 2010, personal income strongly increased for both farm and nonfarm categories, with farm income resurging back into positive figures after seeing net losses.

Median household income in the county is estimated at \$56,988, higher than the state median of \$50,801. Average household income is \$69,600, indicating the top half of workers are earning disproportionately more than bottom half. An estimated 20.9% of workers earn between \$50,000 and \$74,999, while 19.2% earn \$75,00-\$99,999, and an additional 19.2% earn more than \$100,000 but less than \$150,000 per year. 6.2% of households earned less than \$10,000 per year, including 2% of families.

### Beartooth Resource Conservation and Development

Carbon County is a member of the Beartooth Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Economic Development District. Beartooth RC&D is made up of five counties in south central Montana (Big Horn, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone). Carbon County has representation on the governing board and pays membership dues to the organization.

Beartooth RC&D periodically publishes a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), which discusses regional economic development goals and objectives and has data for each member county. The 2019-2023 CEDS is available on the Beartooth RC&D website

or at their offices in Joliet.

## **Public Services**

### Local Government

The Carbon County government consists of a three-member commission. Each commissioner represents one of three districts in the county, serves a six-year term, and is elected by all of the electors of the county. The commission elects a presiding officer from among their members annually. In addition to the commission, there are five other elected positions; Treasurer/Assessor/ Superintendent of Schools, Clerk, Sheriff, Clerk of District Court, and County Attorney.

Carbon County is home to five incorporated communities. Four of these communities, Bearcreek, Bridger, Fromberg, and Joliet, are classified as towns. Red Lodge is a city. All of the municipalities in the county have commission-executive forms of government (mayor and council.) Bearcreek and Joliet have general powers. Bridger has self-governing powers and a charter.

### Planning and Sanitation

The Planning and Sanitation Office was staffed and operated as one department until 2013, when those services were contracted to private consultants. Sanitarian services have since been brought back in-house, while planning is still contracted.

Planning services provided by the Planning Office include; assisting the public and developers in understanding the rules and regulations, subdivision review, survey review, comprehensive planning, floodplain administration and providing support to the planning board. The sanitation services provided include; food service inspections for the approximately 300 restaurants, tourist homes, bed and breakfasts, and bars, inspection of septic system construction and installation, approving plans and issuing septic permits.

Planning services are funded by a combination of subdivision review fees, some state reimbursement, and the taxpayer supported general fund. Grants have been obtained for comprehensive planning. The sanitation services are funded by a combination of permit fees, state reimbursement and General Fund tax revenues.

### Law Enforcement

The Carbon County Sheriff has responsibility for the county- wide dispatch system, coroner duties, and the search and rescue program. The county enforcement staff includes the Sheriff, Undersheriff, Lieutenant, Sergeant, and five deputies. Dispatch staff includes the head dispatcher, five full-time and one part-time permanent dispatchers.

The county has a reserve deputy program with 18 individuals currently certified. The sheriff also serves as the County Coroner. The sheriff/coroner estimates there are approximately 50 unattended deaths per year in the county.

The county search and rescue (SAR) program is comprised entirely of volunteers. Carbon County Search and Rescue averages roughly 30 calls annually and is working with the ambulance service to integrate advanced life support medical care into the program.

Funding for the programs under the sheriff which includes law enforcement, coroner services, and search and rescue has been relatively stable despite the increasing demands of a growing population.

The sheriff's overarching administrative issue is how to provide services to an increasing population under a stable budget scenario. Rural residents' expectations for response are high, and an increasing number of special promotional events drawing visitors consume more and more patrol staff time.

### **Fire Protection**

The county is divided into ten fire districts, eight of which are staffed within the County (Laurel provides fire protection in the Whitehorse Bench area and Absarokee provides fire protection in the Roscoe area).

Funding for the departments comes from a variety of sources including taxing districts, fund raisers, donations, grants, special contracts and contracts for wildland fire fighting with the state.

Issues of concern to the rural fire chiefs are acquiring funds for operations and apparatus (new fire trucks cost approximately \$250,000), attracting and retaining volunteers, the county radio system, water supply, and funds to purchase personal protective equipment. The number of new subdivisions and lots requiring fire protection is also a concern, especially if the development occurs within the Wildland Urban Interface or more than five miles from a fire station.

### **Delineating the Wildland Urban Interface**

Home construction in or near forested areas has been increasing over the last 30 years. These areas have been named Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). According to one study, it is estimated WUI covered 9% of all land area in the U.S. and as many as 39% of all structures are in WUI. Wildfires in the WUI can provide unique challenges for firefighters. By delineating the WUI, fire managers and the public can better prepare for these challenges. For instance, structures located in the designated WUI area can have home assessments completed to help the owner better understand specific risks. See the 2012 Community Wildfire Protection Plan for additional information on the county's significant wildland-urban interface issues.

### **Ambulance**

Three ambulance services cover Carbon County, each one working in a different geographical area. The Red Lodge/Roberts Ambulance District is housed in Red Lodge at the District VII fire station and covers the Red Lodge and Roberts fire districts, approximately 1/3 of the County, including Red Lodge, Bear Creek, Roberts, Luther, Roscoe and the Beartooth Pass and Scenic Highway to the Wyoming border.

Joliet Ambulance covers an area from north of Roberts to South White Horse Bench Road, Joliet, Edgar, Silesia, and the Cooney Reservoir area.

The Clarks Fork Valley Ambulance covers approximately 750 sq. miles in the Belfry, Bridger, Fromberg area.

### **Disaster and Emergency Services**

The county has a part-time Disaster Emergency Services (DES) Coordinator located in the Carbon County Administration building in Red Lodge. The DES program is funded primarily by the state. The county has an active Local Emergency Planning Committee or LEPC. The county completed an Emergency Operations Plan in 2004 to address earthquakes, hazardous materials, dam failure/flooding, national emergency, forest/ range fire, mass casualty accidents, and volcanic ash.

### Health Care and Child Care

The county has four clinics and one hospital. The Beartooth Billings Clinic is located in Red Lodge and is affiliated with Billings Clinic Hospital in Billings. The Mountain View clinic, affiliated with St. Vincent's Healthcare in Billings, is also located in Red Lodge. The Clarks Fork Medical Center, located in Bridger is operated by Riverstone Health based in Billings. Riverstone also offers a clinic in Joliet. The clinics in Red Lodge regularly host visiting specialists from the larger area.

There are two dentists in the county, both located in Red Lodge. Dental care is also available in Laurel and Billings. There is also an optometrist in Red Lodge.

Mental health care is provided in Red Lodge via a satellite office of the Mental Health Center of Billings.

There are three nursing home/ assisted living facilities in the county. Cedar Wood Villa Nursing home is a 76-bed home located in Red Lodge. The Willows constructed a nursing home near the campus of the hospital.

Senior services are provided by the Belfry Senior Citizens Center, the Golden Age Society in Bridger, the Joliet XYZ'ers, the Valley Senior Citizens Center in Fromberg, and the Red Lodge/ Roberts Senior Center in Red Lodge.

Beartooth Billings Clinic employs the county's Public Nurse and is situated in the Carbon County Public Personal Services Building in Red Lodge. The nurse also visits Bridger, Roberts, and Red Lodge.

### Public Assistance

The Department of Public Health and Human Services Office of Public Assistance is located in the Carbon County Public Personal Services Building in Red Lodge. The public assistance office administers local financial assistance programs including Pathways, Medical Assistance (Medicaid and medical assistance for medically needy), the CHIP program (Childrens' Health Insurance Program), food stamp eligibility, and the local food bank. The Office of Public Assistance is operated and funded by the state of Montana.

### Library Services

There are three public libraries in the county. They are located in Red Lodge, Bridger, and Joliet. The Carnegie Library in Red Lodge, built in 1919, is operated by the city and staffed by one full-time librarian and one part-time assistant. The Bridger library is located in the historic Bowler schoolhouse and is operated by three part-time employees. The Joliet library, located in the Joliet Community Center, is staffed by a full-time librarian. There is a six-mill countywide levy supporting the libraries. There are no fees for using the libraries in the county.

## County Attorney

The county attorney is a full-time elected position located in Red Lodge. The county attorney is elected for a four-year term. The office is staffed by the attorney, a deputy attorney, and full-time assistant. Additional legal assistance is contracted as needed.

## Utilities: Electricity

Electricity is provided to county residents by the Beartooth Electric Cooperative, Northwestern Energy (NWE), and the Yellowstone Valley Cooperative. Beartooth Electric is headquartered in Red Lodge and serves customers located outside incorporated communities, and in the unincorporated communities of Roscoe, Luther, Roberts, and the East Rosebud area. The customer base of the cooperative has seen steady growth.

Northwestern Energy provides electricity to Edgar, Fromberg, Bridger, Belfry, Bear Creek, Red Lodge, Joliet, and a small number of rural customers adjacent to the communities. Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative provides electricity to the northern end of Carbon County.

## Natural Gas

Northwestern Energy (NWE) and Montana Dakota Utilities provide the natural gas in Carbon County. Natural gas is not available everywhere. Montana Dakota Utilities (MDU) provides natural gas to Warren, Belfry, Bridger, Fromberg, Edgar, Silesia, Rockvale, and Joliet.

NWE provides gas to Roberts, Red Lodge, the Roscoe area, and one ranch in Belfry. The utility will extend gas service to new customers willing to pay for installation of infrastructure.

## Telephone and Internet

Local telephone service in Carbon County is provided by CenturyLink and Project Telephone. Project Telephone provides services to Belfry, Roscoe and East Rosebud. The rest of the county is served by CenturyLink. AT&T and Verizon provide cellular services across the county. The digital signals require line of sight technology and closer tower intervals.

While there has been a decrease in the number of new towers being constructed, the concern of possible visual impacts near scenic areas still exists. New towers may constitute a land use change, which requires a county development permit. New towers require state building permits.

Internet services and cable are provided by a number of Billings and national companies.

## Cable Television

Cable Television is available from Bresnan in the County. Several satellite TV options are also available.

## **Public Facilities**

### Roads and Highways

The streets and highways in Carbon County are constructed and maintained by a combination of municipalities, the county, the state, the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and private homeowners' associations. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) maintains 23.9 miles of state secondary highway and approximately 153 miles of primary state

highway in the county. A primary highway is a major arterial connecting with a federal highway. A secondary highway is a farm-to-market road that connects to a state highway.

As shown in the table below, traffic continues to increase on most of the county's highways since the 1990s. Increases are most notable on Highway 78 between Red Lodge and Roscoe, and Highway 212 south of Red Lodge, even though the Beartooth Pass is closed seasonally. While some other areas saw slight decreases from 2011, only Highway 308 between Belfry and Red Lodge and Highway 310 south of Bridger saw decreases since 1999. The slight decrease from 2011 and 2018 on Highway 212/310 may be due to the recently completed construction project. Traffic on this stretch of highway should be anticipated to increase rapidly.

| Average Daily Traffic, Carbon County, 1999-2018 (MDT) |  |                            |                            |                            |
|---|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Highway   | Location   | Average Daily Traffic 1999 | Average Daily Traffic 2011 | Average Daily Traffic 2018 |
| 72  | Between Bridger and Belfry                                       | 1,400                      | 1,664                      | 1,897                      |
| 78  | Between Red Lodge and Roscoe                                     | 836                        | 916                        | 980                        |
| 212/310   | Between the Yellowstone/Carbon County line and Rockvale          | 5,375                      | 8,282                      | 7,797                      |
| 212   | Between Joliet and Red Lodge                                     | 2,193                      | 2,794                      | 2,585                      |
| 212   | Between Red Lodge and the Wyoming Line (averaged over 12 months) | 755                        | 953                        | 1,291                      |
| 308   | Between Belfry and Red Lodge                                     | 889                        | 975                        | 818                        |
| 310   | Between Bridger and the Wyoming Line                             | 1,314                      | 1,665                      | 1,291                      |

The reconstruction and realignment of Highway 212/310 from Rockvale to Laurel is a major development in the transportation system on the County. The project rebuilt 10 miles of road, relocating it from the river valley to the bench. Construction began in 2014 and on Jun 24, 2019, the new road was opened to the public. A future planned phase will add an additional two lanes of traffic. This new alignment required the County reassign addresses along the old alignment. The old road has been renamed as Clarks River Road.

Several highway and county road construction and improvement projects are scheduled over the next few years. At the time of writing, MDT is currently rebuilding Highway 212 from Roberts south, with a plan to eventually continue to Red Lodge, in order to provide safety improvements such as widened shoulders, passing lanes, flattening ditch slopes, and improving drainage. MDT also has plans to reconstruct Highway 78 northwest of Red Lodge, but a date for the project has not yet been determined.

### County Roads

Carbon County is responsible for over 900 miles of roads and bridges. Road shops are divided into three districts identical to the County Commissioner districts. County Commissioners act as Road and Bridge supervisors for their districts, with a Foreman hired at each shop. The Road Shops are located in Bridger, Joliet, and Red Lodge.

### Other Roads

The Custer National Forest and BLM both maintain road systems in the county. The Custer Forest maintains approximately 300 miles of roads in Carbon County. These roads and the roads on BLM lands provide access for public and administrative uses. There are no roads in the wilderness area.

New subdivisions often have their own internal road systems. The county does not accept responsibility of new road systems, but requires that provisions for maintenance of the roads be in place through an appropriate mechanism such as a Homeowners' Association. Subdivisions roads must be constructed to the appropriate county standard to assure safety and emergency vehicle access.

### Air Transportation

There are two public-use airports in Carbon County. Red Lodge has an airstrip located on the west bench above the city. Aviation fuel is available at Red Lodge. Red Lodge airport is classified as a general aviation airport. The Red Lodge strip is 4,000 feet in length and paved.

Bridger Municipal airport is also classified as general aviation and has a paved 3,400- foot airstrip on the west edge of town. This runway can accommodate large twin engine planes. There is no instrumentation at Bridger. Aviation fuel is not available, nor is there a fixed-base operator.

In addition to the two public airports in Carbon County, there are approximately 14 private- use airstrips primarily used to support ranching operations.

### Rail Transportation

Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) operates in the County. BNSF owns and maintains 50 miles of mainline and nine miles of yard track in Carbon County. The rail line runs east of and parallel to Highway 212/310 from Laurel south to the junction with Highway 310 then on to Bridger. From Bridger the line leaves the river bottom and follows Highway 310 south into Wyoming. In any given 24-hour period, four to six trains cross the county traveling between Laurel and Denver.

### Public Water Systems

The city of Red Lodge, the towns of Bridger, Joliet, Fromberg,, Bearcreek, and the communities of Belfry and Roberts all have public water systems, and all have adopted hook-up fees. The incorporated municipalities do their own administration of the systems such as planning for and financing improvements, setting base rates and hook-up fees, and billing. Red Lodge, Roberts, Fromberg, and Joliet meter their water.

The State Department of Revenue and the county cooperatively assist the rural water districts by assessing users on their property taxes once a year in Edgar, Belfry and Roberts. The local districts handle the collection of hook-up fees and other local administrative issues.

Water system operators and water district board members report concerns with meeting state requirements for having licensed operators, and also the day-to-day management of protecting the infrastructure.

There are a number of private water systems serving subdivisions, campgrounds, and mobile home parks. The owners of these private systems are responsible for testing water quality and submitting results to the state and county sanitarian.

Most of the rural residents obtain their domestic water from individual wells although a few obtain water from springs. In some areas, cisterns are utilized due to lack of available groundwater. In this case residents must buy and haul water to their property to fill their cistern, or contract for these services.

There have been no known occurrences of contaminated groundwater affecting individual wells where the wells were properly installed. Although Joliet has submitted a wellhead protection study to the Montana DEQ, none of the communities in the county have approved wellhead protection plans.

### Waste Water Systems

Rural residents in the county typically have individual septic systems. All systems installed since 1968 are required to have a county septic permit. Most of the rural systems are standard gravity septic tank and drainfield systems. Some areas where groundwater is too high or percolation too rapid, special systems must be employed.

County residents have recently raised concerns about the potential for future groundwater contamination associated with increasing development. This is especially notable in major subdivisions proposing to utilize individual septic systems.

Belfry, Edgar, and Roberts have sewer districts which operate community waste water systems. Fromberg and Bridger are permitted to discharge from their waste water facilities into the Clarks Forks River while Joliet and Red Lodge are permitted to discharge into Rock Creek. Several communities are considering raising base rates, hook-up charges, or both to finance needed maintenance and improvements.

### Solid Waste

Solid waste collection for the entire county is provided by Allied Waste Systems (AWS) or MacKenzie Disposal, both located in Billings. AWS has waste collection contracts with the City of Red Lodge and the Towns of Bridger and Joliet.

There are various issues with the waste generated by rural residents and especially second home owners. The City of Billings owns and operates the sanitary landfill in which all of the waste generated in Carbon County is disposed. The city has 700 acres set aside for its landfill, 280 of which are currently under permit with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The permit is in effect until the acres under permit are filled with waste.

The City of Billings has separate annual agreements for waste disposal with Carbon County, the City of Red Lodge, and the Towns of Bridger, Fromberg, and Joliet. All remaining landfills in Carbon County were closed in the 1990s.

Joliet, Bridger, and Red Lodge participate in voluntary recycling programs initiated by the communities. Red Lodge has a recycling facility open two days a week. AWS hauls the recyclable materials to Billings without charge and processes the materials.

### **Natural Resources**

## Soil Resources

In 1975, the U.S.D.A. and the Forest Service in cooperation with the Montana Agricultural Experimental Station published a Soil Survey for the Carbon County Area Montana. The survey stated: “ The soils of Carbon County can generally be described in five separate geographic areas, each having unique landscape-soil relationships” (Carbon County General Resource Assessment, NRCS, 1999). Detailed surveys completed as recently as 2003 in the NRCS Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO), the most- detailed county-level digital soil database, provide large-scale soil unit boundaries for Carbon County. The survey identifies 178 soil types, with four major types prevalent across the county: wet silty clay loams, silty clay loams, fine sandy loams and extremely stony loams. Southwestern Carbon County (Beartooth-Absaroka Wilderness) was not included in the survey.

## Mineral Resources

These are located generally along major highway corridors throughout the county, with most along the State Highway 78 and US Highway 212 corridors.

Gravels generally suitable for construction uses are found throughout the county in the alluvium and alluvial terraces. Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology maps showing the locations of these formations — specifically Quaternary Alluvial Terraces (Qat), Quaternary Pediment Gravels (Qpg), and Alluvial Fans (Qaf ) — indicate the potential gravel sources in Carbon County. These maps can be found at [www.mbmgs.mtech.edu](http://www.mbmgs.mtech.edu) by going to one of the four appropriate quadrangles covering Carbon County.

Bentonite is found to the west and southwest of the Pryor Mountains. Gypsum which has not been mined commercially since the 1920's is found in outcrops east of Gypsum Spring and in three locations west of the Pryor Mountains. Large private surface mining operations exist in the southwest corner of the Pryor Mountains on private land.

## Oil and Gas

The first oil well drilled in Montana was in Elk Basin, in 1915. At present, only the Dry Creek and Elk Basin Fields are in significant production. Oil exploration is currently occurring near Belfry on private land, and on the Mackay Dome in the western part of the County.

## Coal

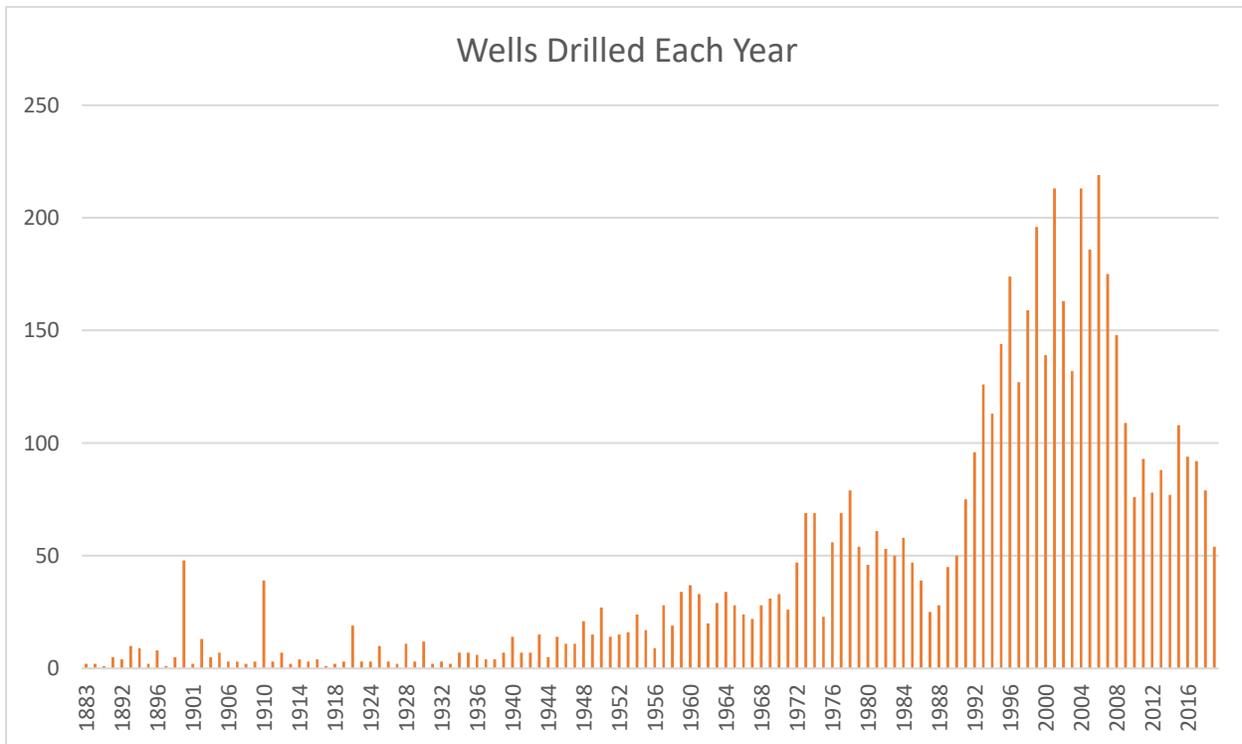
Coal is found in several locations in the county including Bridger, Fromberg, Red Lodge, Bear Creek, and the Silver Tip coal field on the Wyoming border. The coal at Bridger is found in three distinct beds covering a total of 13,660 acres. The Bear Creek field contains nine separate beds in the Fort Union formation with a total thickness of 71 feet of coal. West of Rock Creek, coal lies in a narrow, steeply-dipping zone which terminates against the Beartooth thrust fault. The BLM estimates that there are still significant coal reserves in the Bridger and Bear Creek fields. Despite the potential availability of coal, there are currently no operating coal mines in Carbon County.

## Surface and Ground Water

Carbon County's water resources are managed by private and public landowners, water rights holders, and municipalities.

The water resource consists of both surface and groundwater. Groundwater in Carbon County is stored both in consolidated and unconsolidated aquifers. The three primary groundwater areas in the county are the Beartooth Plateau, the Pryor uplift, and the basins.

There are approximately 5,784 water wells in the county. Peak water well drilling occurred in the mid-2000s, but has tapered off over the past decade. This may be due to the housing market recession, new state rules for when a water right is required, or a combination of both. About 4,139 wells (61%) are used for domestic drinking water. Eighteen percent, or about 1,209 wells are used for stockwater, while about ten percent are irrigation wells.



Domestic water resources are typically less than 100 feet deep. Most of the wells in Carbon County are shallow wells, with only 94 deeper than 500 feet. The first well was drilled in 1883.

There are two hydroelectric generating stations in the county, both located on the South Fork of Dry Creek east of Red Lodge. The larger station generates 2 Megawatts while a smaller downstream station generates 0.5 Megawatts.

There are two state-owned dams in the county. Located on Red Lodge Creek, Cooney Dam, which is 102 feet high, was completed in 1937 to provide water storage for irrigation. The reservoir stores 28,400 acre feet of water. Cooney Dam also created Cooney Reservoir State Park, which is a popular recreation site in the summer months. The Glacier Lake Dam at 57 feet in height was also completed in 1937. The Glacier Lake Dam stores 4,200 acre feet.

### Wildlife

The diversity and extent of high quality habitat in the county supports a wide range of wildlife species. In addition to numerous ungulates, Carbon County is home to two species of bears, gray wolves, mountain lions, a variety of upland birds, raptors, and non-game species.

A recent state habitat conservation effort identified parts of the county as Greater Sage Grouse Core Areas, which continues to effect land and natural resources development in the south and eastern parts of the county. The conservation plan will seek to keep management in state, rather than federal, hands.

### **Scenic Resources**

Scenic resources, like all other natural and fiscal resources, should be considered a significant economic asset for Carbon County. County residents and visitors value the outstanding natural appearing landscape which is an important facet to the quality of life in Carbon County and a draw for recreationists, current residents, and potential future residents.

In 1989, the Beartooth Highway was classified as a National Forest Scenic Byway because of the spectacular views along its route. The Beartooth Highway received about 1,291 vehicles per day in 2018. The Absaroka Beartooth Mountain front range is a dramatic topographical feature visible from most the county, including along the main highways.

Siting, height, and setback requirements for certain developments (telecommunication towers, Highway 212 signage, wind turbines, etc.) are addressed in the County's Development Regulations.

### **Culture and Tourism**

In recent decades, culture and tourism have become major economic drivers in Carbon County. Retail shopping, lodging, dining and touring have been driven by growth in Billings and other outside areas. Tourism is quickly becoming the county's most important economic resource. According to a 2012 report from the US Forest Service ("The Economy of Carbon County", USFS, 2012), "Carbon County was more reliant on industries connected to travel and tourism than either the state of Montana or the nation as a whole in 2009" due to employment contributions (pg. 3).

The county can be classified by four descriptive characteristics:

- Gateway
- Amenity-rich
- Rural
- Second home/retirement

These all provide value to the citizens in this region. As a gateway community, Carbon County inherits a strong tourism base because of Yellowstone National Park and the Beartooth Highway.

Being located between fifteen minutes to a few-hour's drive from Billings, Carbon County is just far enough away from Montana's largest metro area to be considered a rural community, but close enough to be accessible to the roughly 110,000 people in the Billings metro area. Because of proximity to natural amenities like Yellowstone National Park, the city, and the availability of services and comforts, Carbon County has become a destination for retirees and second homeowners.

This provides both challenges and opportunities for the County and its communities. As previously discussed, the County sees a large and growing amount of traffic on its highways, a condition that is expected to increase as construction projects repair and improve these highways.

Yellowstone National Park and the Beartooth Pass continue to be a major tourist attraction. The Beartooth Pass entrance through Cooke City/Silver Gate is the least traveled of the three entrances to the park in Montana, however this is due to the seasonal highway closure.

The route through the Paradise Valley from Livingston to Gardiner (open year round) sees over twice as many vehicles as the Beartooth Pass. The entrance from Bozeman through the Gallatin Valley and West Yellowstone sees a similar number of vehicles.

Carbon County's abundance of cultural, heritage or archaeological resources plays a role in development permitting and review, particularly in rural unincorporated areas. Most development projects require a state cultural resources inventory and approval. For certain projects, the state generally requires impacts to these resources to be mitigated.