

1 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

The Western Montana Region Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) is the product of a regional planning process coordinated by Montana Disaster & Emergency Services (MT DES) in 2022-2023 to develop regional hazard mitigation plans covering the entire state of Montana. The following jurisdictions have prepared and adopted this Plan:

- Broadwater County
 - City of Townsend
- Butte-Siler Bow City and County
 - Town of Walkerville
- Lake County
 - City of Polson
 - City of Ronan
 - Town of St. Ignatius
- Lincoln County
 - City of Libby
 - City of Troy
 - Town of Eureka
- Mineral County
 - Town of Alberton
 - Town of Superior
 - Unincorporated Town of St. Regis
- Park County
 - City of Livingston
 - Town of Clyde Park
- Sanders County
 - City of Thompson Falls
 - Town of Plains
 - Town of Hot Springs
- Beaverhead County
 - City of Dillon
 - Town of Lima
- Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Reservation
- Granite County
 - Town of Drummond
 - Town of Philipsburg
- Lewis and Clark County
 - City of Helena
 - City of East Helena
- Meagher County
- Ravalli County
 - City of Hamilton
 - Town of Darby
 - Town of Stevensville
- Flathead County
 - City of Columbia Falls
 - City of Kalispell
 - City of Whitefish
- Jefferson County
 - City of Boulder
 - Town of Whitehall
- Madison County
 - Town of Ennis
 - Town of Sheridan
 - Town of Twin Bridges
 - Town of Virginia City
- Powell County
 - City of Deer Lodge
- Sweet Grass County
 - City of Big Timber

The purpose of hazard mitigation is to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from disasters or hazard events. The impacts of hazards can often be lessened or even avoided if appropriate actions are taken before events occur. Studies have found that hazard mitigation is extremely cost-effective, with every dollar spent on mitigation saving an average of \$6 in avoided future losses. By reducing exposure to known hazard risks, communities will save lives and property and minimize the social, economic, and environmental disruptions that commonly follow hazard events.

The 2023 Western Montana Region HMP (also referred to as “Plan”) will serve as a blueprint for coordinating and implementing hazard mitigation policies, programs, and projects across the Region. It identifies

mitigation goals and related actions to assist the participating jurisdictions in reducing risk and preventing loss from future hazard events. The goals of the 2023 Western Montana Region HMP are:

Goal 1: Reduce impacts to people, property, the environment, and the economy from hazards.

Goal 2: Protect community lifelines and critical infrastructure to ensure the continuity of essential services.

Goal 3: Promote education and outreach to the public around hazards and mitigation.

Goal 4: Promote regional cooperation and leverage partnerships in mitigation solutions.

Goal 5: Sustain and enhance jurisdictional capabilities to enact mitigation activities.

Goal 6: Integrate hazard mitigation into other plans, processes, and regulations.

Goal 7: Ensure local mitigation programs address underrepresented groups and protect socially vulnerable populations.

Goal 8: Incorporate the potential impacts of climate change into all mitigation activities.

This Plan was also developed to maintain the participating jurisdictions' eligibility for federal disaster assistance, specifically the FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grants including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) program, and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program, as well as the Rehabilitation of High Hazard Potential Dam (HHPD) grant program.

It is important that local decision-makers stay involved in mitigation planning to provide new ideas and insight for future updates to the Regional HMP. As a long-term goal, the HMP and the mitigation strategies identified within will be fully integrated into the daily decisions and routines of local government. This will continue to require dedication and hard work, and to this end, this Plan update continues efforts to further strengthen the resiliency of the Region.

1.2 Purpose

The participating jurisdictions of the Western Montana Region prepared this regional hazard mitigation plan to guide hazard mitigation planning and to better protect the people and property of the planning area from the effects of hazard events. This plan demonstrates the Region's commitment to reducing risks from hazards and serves as a tool to help decision-makers direct mitigation activities and resources. This plan also maintains the jurisdictions' eligibility for federal disaster assistance under the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) grant programs including the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program. This plan demonstrates the Region and participating jurisdictions' commitment to reducing risks from hazards and serves as a tool to help decision-makers direct mitigation activities and resources.

1.3 Background and Scope

Each year in the United States, disasters take the lives of hundreds of people and injure thousands more. Nationwide, taxpayers pay billions of dollars annually to help communities, organizations, businesses, and individuals recover from disasters. These monies only partially reflect the true cost of disasters because additional expenses to insurance companies and nongovernmental organizations are not reimbursed by tax dollars. Many disasters are predictable, and much of the damage caused by these events can be alleviated or even eliminated.

Hazard mitigation is defined by FEMA as “any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to human life and property from a hazard event.” The results of a three-year, congressionally mandated independent study to assess future savings from mitigation activities provides evidence that mitigation activities are highly cost-effective. On average, each dollar spent on mitigation saves society an average of \$6 in avoided future losses in addition to saving lives and preventing injuries (Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves, 2019 Report).

Hazard mitigation planning is the process through which hazards that threaten communities are identified, likely impacts of those hazards are determined, mitigation goals are set, and appropriate strategies to lessen impacts are developed, prioritized, and implemented. This plan documents the planning region’s hazard mitigation planning process, identifies relevant hazards and risks, and identifies the strategies that each participating jurisdiction will use to decrease vulnerability and increase resiliency and sustainability.

This plan was prepared pursuant to the requirements of the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-390) and the implementing regulations set forth by the Interim Final Rule published in the Federal Register on February 26, 2002 (44 CFR §201.6) and finalized on October 31, 2007 (hereafter, these requirements and regulations will be referred to collectively as the Disaster Mitigation Act (DMA)). While the act emphasized the need for mitigation plans and more coordinated mitigation planning and implementation efforts, the regulations established the requirements that local hazard mitigation plans must meet for a local jurisdiction to be eligible for certain federal disaster assistance and hazard mitigation funding under the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Act (Public Law 93-288). Because the planning area is subject to many kinds of hazards, access to these programs is vital.

Information in this plan will be used to help guide and coordinate mitigation activities and decisions for local land use policy in the future. Proactive mitigation planning will help reduce the cost of disaster response and recovery to communities and property owners by protecting critical community facilities, reducing liability exposure, and minimizing overall community impacts and disruption. The jurisdictions in the planning area have been affected by hazards in the past and are thus committed to reducing future disaster impacts and maintaining eligibility for federal funding.

1.4 Plan Organization

The Western Montana Region Hazard Mitigation Plan is organized in alignment with the DMA planning requirements and the FEMA plan review crosswalk as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction
- Chapter 2: Region Profile
- Chapter 3: Planning Process
- Chapter 3.4: Hazard Analysis and Risk Assessment
- Chapter 5: Mitigation Strategy
- Chapter 6: Plan Adoption, Implementation, and Maintenance
- County and Tribal Annexes
- Appendices

Each annex provides a more detailed assessment of each jurisdiction’s unique risks as well as their mitigation strategy to reduce long-term losses. Each annex contains the following:

1. Mitigation Planning and County Planning Team
2. Community Profile
3. Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment
4. Vulnerability to Specific Hazards

5. Mitigation Capabilities Assessment
6. Mitigation Strategy
7. Plan Implementation and Maintenance

1.5 Multi-Jurisdictional Planning

This plan was prepared as a regional, multi-jurisdictional plan. The Western Montana Region is comprised of eighteen (18) counties and one tribal reservation, as established by MT DES. All tribes, counties, and incorporated municipalities in the Region were invited to participate in the planning process. Both Gallatin and Missoula Counties elected not to participate in the Regional plan, having begun their own updates to their respective county HMPs. The City and County of Anaconda-Deer Lodge also elected not to participate in the regional planning process. The Town of Neihart also elected not to participate due to limited staff and resources. All other tribes, counties, and incorporated municipalities fully participated in the planning process, and have committed to adopt and implement the Regional HMP. The participating jurisdictions seeking FEMA approval of this plan are listed in Section 1.1.

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