

Meeting Minutes for Visit Southeast Montana Board of Directors

The **MISSION** of Visit Southeast Montana is to increase visitors to Southeast Montana by increasing awareness of our region, showcasing our cultural heritage, developing memorable experiences and educating our residents about the economic benefits of tourism. www.SoutheastMontana.com

June 19, 2019 – 10:30 a.m. – 2:35 p.m.
Ekalaka Event's Center
209 W. Speelmon St.
Ekalaka, MT 59324

Board Members in Attendance:

Jeff Ewelt, Dale Galland, Beth Epley, Glenn Heitz, Diane Murnion, Leslie Janshen, Sabre Moore, Randy Schoppe, Mike Tranel, Chris Dantic, Jessica Malone, Kevin Kooistra, Mabelle Curl, Shyla Hadley, Christine Whitlatch

Staff Present:

John Brewer, Brenda Maas, Michele Flanagan

Guests:

Kristen Sackett (Windfall Studio), John Ashley (International DARK-SKY Association), Eva Grimes (Ekalaka Chamber of Commerce President), Christa VanDyke (Glendive Chamber of Commerce Executive Director), Tracy Schiess

Welcome and Introductions:

Meeting called to order at 10:35 a.m. Attendance and introductions made. Eva Grimes welcomed the group and gave a short overview of Ekalaka.

Public Comments:

Christine Whitlatch expressed how much she's enjoyed being a part of the board and will continue to advocate for Southeast Montana. Sabre reports the trip to Washington D.C. where she represented Montana as a Dinosaur Trail ambassador went well.

Approval of April 17, 2019 Meeting Minutes:

Jeff Ewelt moved to approve. Sabre Moore provided second. No discussion. Motion passed.

Financial Overview:

John Brewer gave financial overview, noting revenue over expenses is \$14,889 due to an increase in lodging tax dollars, (+8%) and increase in allowable 20% for administrative expenses; therefore, Unrestricted Funds did not have to cover any administrative expenses for FY2019. Jessica Malone moved to approve, Diane Murnion provided second. Motion passed.

FY2020 Administrative and Unrestricted Budgets

John proposed Unrestricted Funds will cover the balance of Administrative expenses that exceed the allowable 20% for FY20 budgeted to be \$4,022. Glenn Heitz moved to approve, Kevin Kooistra provided second. Motion passed.

Strategic Discussion:

Marketing Update

Brenda reviewed the quarterly dashboard noting the number of travel guides actually being requested and the number of leads received from the call center. An email is still being sent to top market inquiries offering guide information if wanted. Top state inquiries stayed consistent: Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, California and Florida. Top areas of interest are scenic driving, history and Little Bighorn Battlefield. Social media numbers are still up, most likely due to paid social which has in turn boosted organic content. She also notes the FY20 Marketing Plan & Budget presented to TAC was approved, IPW and International Roundup went well resulting in hosting 4 journalists/photographers and hosting pre-fam. Brenda provided updates on TBEX landing page and notes 7 blog posts have been promoted via E-BLAST and SEMT video continues to promote across multiple channels. A Board Retreat/Strategy Session was approved by executive committee and will be scheduled for this fall. Also Brenda plans to visit the regions three VIC's in order to better understand visitors and the front-line help.

Strategic Goals:

Produce Quality Marketing Initiatives

Kristen from Windfall presented update on FY19 media performance, photo library and website. She notes a significant drop in unique visits on the website due to media buys ending. Windfall and Brenda to reassess media placement in upcoming strategy session for more consistent results.

BREAK FOR LUNCH

Develop Marketing Partnerships...Outside the Region

Montana Heritage Foundation Presentation

Christine Whitlatch spoke about the Montana Outdoor Heritage Project bringing Montanans from all walks of life to discuss the growing need to increase funding to protect Montana's outdoor heritage, i.e., water, wildlife, working farms and the last best places to hunt, fish and camp. Christine encouraged all to take the Heritage Survey and join/host small group gatherings to discuss and share ideas.

International Dark Skies Association

John Ashley (President of MT IDSA chapter) spoke about the International Dark Sky Association (IDSA) and its dedication to preserving the natural nighttime environment by educating policymakers and the public about night sky conservation and promoting eco-friendly outdoor lighting. John notes 3 parks in Montana, two of which are in SEMT, have started the process to be certified places of International Dark Skies.

Eastern Montana Tourism Partner Initiative

Brenda and Jeff provided brief update and noted warm season promotion of Montana Dinosaur Trail (family) and history aspects (educated travelers/history buffs).

Grow In-Region Partnerships...to Connect to Constituents

Glendive CVB Presentation of Video

Christine Whitlatch presents Visit Glendive brought in a national licensed drone photographer and produced a new promotional video. Video was well received and Christine encouraged all to share once it's on their social channels.

Letters of Support

Brenda noted the seven letters of support from SEMT on pages 14-20. All seven organizations were grant recipients of the Tourism Grant Program that awarded nearly \$550,000 to help 44 communities across Montana boost attendance at events to grow visitor spending. Brenda encouraged all to reach out if in need of letter of support.

Update on TBEX

Brenda provided updates on the 3 FAMS and 1 Post FAM hosted by SEMT on pages 21-25 of Board Packet. Also encouraged all to submit their TBEX "Deals" on landing page.

Support Tourism Product Development

Nothing new to report.

Committee/Task Force and Board Reports:

Grants Committee

In absence of Committee Chair, Chip Watts, Brenda provided update: Nearly \$8,000 has been approved for award, including grants to 7th Annual Shindig; Baker Lake Way-Finding Signs; Second Annual Fall Festival Military & First Responders Appreciation Day (Pompeys Pillar); Powder River County Centennial & All-School Reunion; RIDE; YAM – Summerfair 41. The revised 3x/year cycle has created efficiencies in the process.

Nominating Committee

New Board Applicants

Recommended to accept the following Board applicants: Vicki Leesburg (Vintage & Rustics in Montana/Custer County); Norma Trent as primary board member (KQLJ – 105.5 FM Radio Station & Roundup SPA Church/Musselshell County). Leslie Janshen moved to approve and Mabelle Curl provided second. Motion passed.

Ex-Officio

Recommended to accept Christa VanDyke (Glendive Chamber of Commerce/Dawson County). Shyla Hadley moved to approve, Jessica Malone seconds. Motion passed.

Expiring/Renewable Seats

Leslie Janshen eligible for second term but resigned and submitted resignation letter. Dennis Kopitzke eligible for second term. After a brief discussion it was decided to not have Dennis fulfill his second term due to lack of board meeting attendance. Jeff Ewelt moved to approve, Sabre Moore provided second. Motion passed.

Executive Board

Recommended to accept Executive Board for second term. Dale Galland (Chair); Chip Watts (Past Chairman); Jeff Ewelt (Vice Chair); Sabre Moore (Secretary/Treasurer). Diane Murnion moved to approve and Beth Epley provided second. Motion passed.

Marketing Project Committee Update

Sabre gave update on three different concepts for future itineraries.

- Theodore Roosevelt Tour
- Battlefield History
- Veteran's History

Other Announcements

- Leslie Janshen: Miles City BBQ Cook off was successful, and the Bomber Jacket Ball is June 22.
- Diane Murnion: States the Matthew Quigley Buffalo Rifle Match had about 600 people attend and the Roadside County Fair is July 17-20.
- John Brewer: Reports the challenges of crime and public safety will continue to be priority for the Billings Chamber and work on the Boothill Cemetery continues.
- Chris Dantic: Makoshika State Park Buzzard Day was successful and the road in Makoshika State Park opened. Bison Hide-Working at Chief Plenty Coups State Park scheduled for June 30.
- Beth Epley: June 21 Baker Lake will have a ribbon cutting and will showcase a series of 3 new signs that show the lake's evolution. Also, a Bus Brew Tour from Baker to Wibaux to Glendive is now available in support of a local fundraiser.

- Glenn Heitz: Prairie County Museum and Evelyn Cameron Gallery opened Memorial Day. Also, the Prairie County's rifle range on public land was approved.
- Jeff Ewelt: The Renaissance Fair brought in just under 8,000 attendees. Summer concert series starts this week, will find out if ZooMontana gets AZA accreditation in September and will soon be getting a sloth and badger exhibit.
- Jessica Malone: The Powder River County Centennial and All School Celebration will be July 4-7.
- Dale Galland: Encouraged all to attend the Prairie County 4th of July rodeo.
- Randy Schoppe: Little Big Horn Days will be June 20-23 with expanded family focused activities. TBEX Pre FAMS set for Sept 10 -11.
- Mike Tranel: June 25th is the anniversary of the Battle of Little Bighorn, Bighorn Lake had a 6 foot rise in the last week.
- Shyla Hadley: Circus Saurus is June 27, would like input for vendors for farmer's markets.
- Machel Curl: Thanks board for the card.
- Sabre Moore: Shares Carter County Museum's summer programs for kids, community star labs, junior society explorer and star party dates and Dino-Shindig is July 27-28.
- Kevin Kooistra: Saving Our Stars is June 20th and encourages all to check out the Ben Steele exhibit.
- Christa VanDyke: Miss Montana, Crazy Days and BBQ in the Badlands are all upcoming events.

Meeting adjourned 2:35 p.m.

Board Meeting Schedule

All meetings 10 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. unless otherwise noted. All times subject to change.

The Executive Board will prepare the FY20 meeting schedule and Brenda will share by early August.

Group was invited to visit the Carter County Museum.