



Mineral County, Alberton and Superior Growth Policy Update

2016

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Thank You Citizens

A special thanks to all of the residents of Mineral County and the Towns of Alberton and Superior who contributed to this plan by participating in public meetings, submitting comments and filling out survey forms. Your time, efforts and ideas are appreciated and reflected in this plan.

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Introduction

Mineral County is a place characterized by its natural landscape. From the Clark Fork River Valley to the St. Regis River Valley to the towering and forested Bitterroot Mountains, the valley floors, streams drainages and hillsides have shaped the history and the way of life for Mineral County residents. Mineral County residents cherish the stunning beauty of their surroundings, as well as the rural quality of life, wildlife, and the small town values the surroundings instill among neighbors.

The natural landscape has played a major role in shaping the economy of Mineral County. In the late 1800s the discovery of gold brought prospectors to the area, resulting in transient settlements. With expansion and settlement of the west came the railroad, bringing more established communities, some of which exist today, while others stand only in memory and history books. As Mineral County progressed in the 20th century the timber industry became the primary economic driver. While the timber industry remains the economic base, timber harvesting in Mineral County declined steadily in the 1980s and 90s and today is a fraction of what it once was. Despite economic setbacks, Mineral County has grown steadily over the last 20 years.

The jurisdiction of this Growth Policy includes the Towns of Alberton and Superior as well as the unincorporated areas of Mineral County, including the communities of Saltese, Haugan, De Borgia, St. Regis, Lozeau, Tarkio and Cyr. See Figure 1 for an overview map of Mineral County and its communities.

This Growth Policy is intended to serve as a planning guide for local officials and citizens for the next 20 years. It is a long-range statement of local public policy, providing guidance for accommodating development within the county. The plan is designed to be used by local government officials as they make decisions which have direct or indirect land use and community development implications. Further, it is designed to be used by officials of other government agencies (federal, state and local entities) as a framework for coordinating their land use planning efforts in Mineral County. The document will be reviewed and, if necessary, updated at least every five years to make sure it is relevant and provides guidance for addressing changing land use and development issues.

Planning is a systematic process aimed at addressing issues at the local and regional level. It provides an opportunity to create, debate, and implement policies that will allow the county and communities to achieve a vision for the future as well as more specific goals and objectives. The process follows a logical path that begins with a review of existing conditions, recent trends and projected needs for community services and facilities. It is based on conversations with the public and local officials, who help to frame major issues and define the community's opportunities and challenges, both in the present and moving forward.

This 2016 Mineral County/Alberton/Superior Growth Policy is an update to the 2008 Growth Policy and was developed to meet the requirements of Montana Code Annotated 76- 1-601. It includes an analysis of existing conditions, trends and key issues on topics ranging from population and economics to public infrastructure and land use. It also covers intergovernmental coordination, subdivision review, wildland-urban interface and other required elements of State law. The final chapter of the Growth Policy contains a detailed implementation strategy that provides goals, objectives, and actions for implementing this plan.

Figure 1 - Mineral County Base Map



What is a Growth Policy?

A Growth Policy is a long-range plan for a community. In many places around the country these documents are known as comprehensive plans or general plans. In Montana, the legislature branded them growth policies. Local governments use growth policies as a general guide for making decisions regarding the community's physical, social, and economic development.

A Growth Policy takes stock of what a community was yesterday, is today, and provides a vision for what a community would like to become tomorrow. It includes goals based on community priorities and an action plan to help achieve those goals.

Fundamentally a Growth Policy is a guidance document, not a regulatory document, and it does not necessarily require regulations to be adopted. However, growth policies provide the legal framework and philosophical foundation upon which future plans, regulations and initiatives are based.

Vision

A vision statement is a preamble that sets the stage for the Growth Policy. It is intended to describe what the Growth Policy is designed to achieve. It reflects the community's self-image, articulates its aspirations, and describes what members of the community would like Mineral County to be in 20 years.

Mineral County residents enjoy a healthy Montana lifestyle based around the beauty, use and enjoyment of our rugged mountains, forests, rivers and lakes. We take pride in the quality of and access to natural resources and amenities, making this a great place to live and to visit. We are committed to sustainable resource use and management, which forms the foundation of our livelihoods, recreation, custom and culture.

Mineral County communities are safe, friendly, attractive and stable. Each community has unique small town character and provides great access to the outdoors. Our communities take advantage of their locations along major transportation and high speed telecommunications corridors. The cost of living is low, and our communities are well designed, functional and provide for the daily needs of residents and visitors. This is a great place to raise a family, start a business, and to retire.

Most importantly, the residents of Mineral County are active in our communities and look out for each other. We work together to meet challenges head on. Mineral County and the Towns of Alberton and Superior provide a rural lifestyle and sense of community that make us proud to call this place home.

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of existing conditions, trends, projections, and key issues for Mineral County and the Towns of Alberton and Superior. Mineral County covers over 1,200 square miles, which by Montana standards is on the small side, ranking at 51st among Montana counties in terms of land area. Over 90% of Mineral County is publically owned by the U.S. Forest Service and the State of Montana, making areas of private development a small portion of the overall county. The Towns of Superior and Alberton are the only two incorporated communities in Mineral County. The other un-incorporated communities include Saltese, Haugan, De Borgia, St. Regis, Lozeau, Tarkio and Cyr.

Population

Over the last 40 years population growth in Mineral County has been steady, with a slight decrease during the recession of the 1980s – see Figure 2. In recent years however, Mineral County’s population growth has slowed, with an estimated population of 4,230 as of 2014.¹ In contrast to Mineral County, the Town of Superior has steadily decreased in population – see Figure 3. More recently Superior’s population has increased slightly since 2010, with an estimated population of 864 as of 2014.² Population change in the Town of Alberton has been more reflective of Mineral County as a whole and has also experienced a small amount of growth since 2010, with a 2014 estimated population of 476 - see Figure 4.

Figure 2 - Mineral County Population Change 1970 – 2010

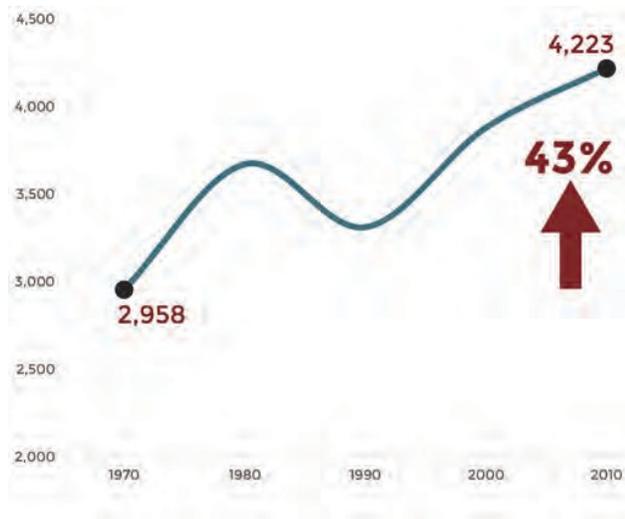


Figure 3 - Superior Population Change 1970 - 2010

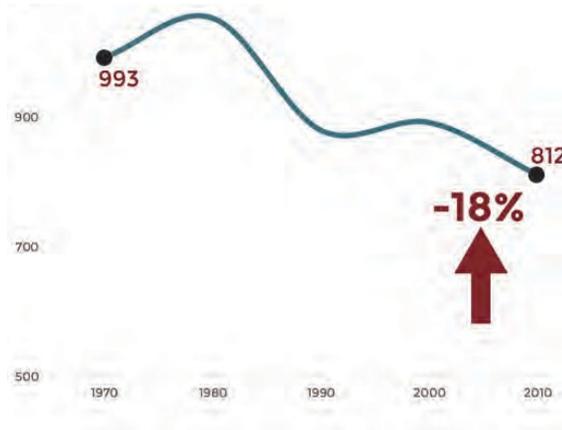
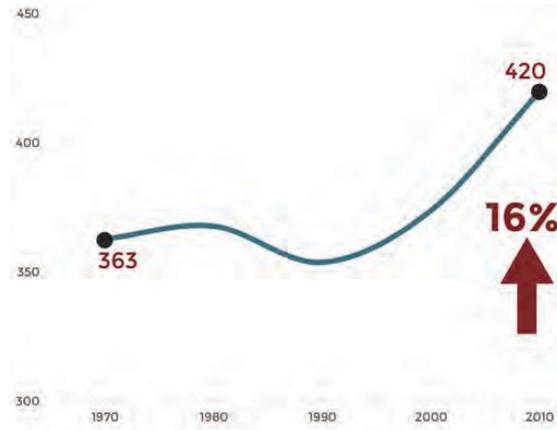


Figure 4 - Alberton Population Change 1970 - 2010



Aging Population

In Mineral County, to an even greater extent than the rest of the United States, the population is aging. Retirees are moving in, families are having fewer children, and residents are living longer. Figure 5 shows that both the absolute number and the percent of individuals under the age of 18 in Mineral County decreased between 2000 and 2014. At the same time these figures for individuals over the age of 65 increased substantially. The same is true for Alberton, as seen in Figure 6, where the over 65 population tripled between 2000 and 2014. Superior, on the other hand, has experienced a different trend, with an increase in the number and percentage of individuals under 18 and no change for individuals over 65 – see Figure 7.⁴

Figure 5- Mineral County Age Distribution

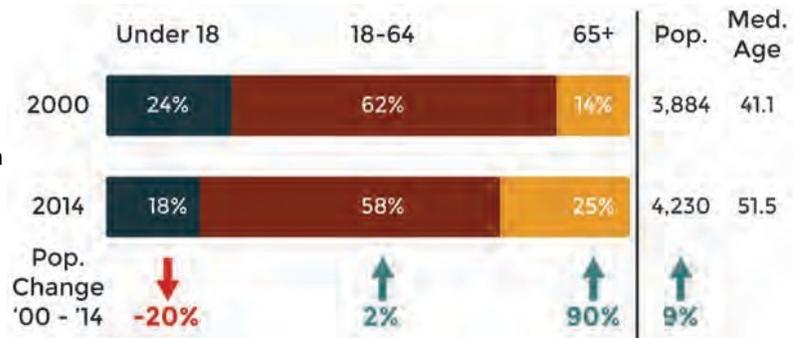


Figure 6- Alberton Age Distribution

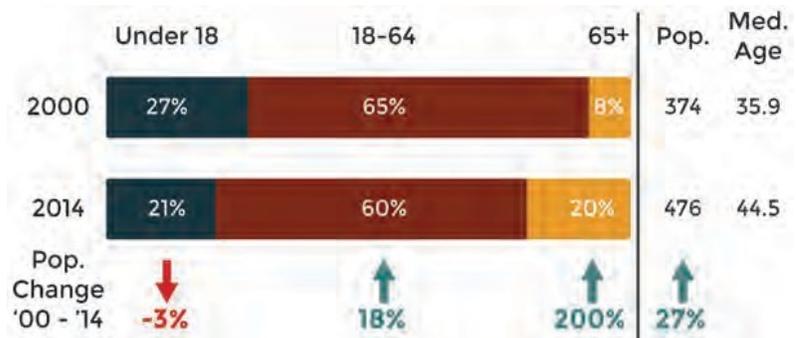


Figure 7- Superior Age Distribution



Projections

The state of Montana’s Census and Economic Information Center provides county level population projections produced by Regional Economic Models, Inc. Local level projections for the Towns of Alberton and Superior are not available. Looking forward, Mineral County’s population is projected to grow over the next 10 years and then experience a sharp decrease going out to 2035 – see Figure 8.

In terms of growth within different age groups, Mineral County’s senior (65+) and youth (under 20) populations are projected to increase by 3% and 10%, respectively, by 2035, while the 20-64 age group is projected to decrease by 7% - see Figure 9.

Figure 8 - Mineral County Population Projection 2014 - 2035

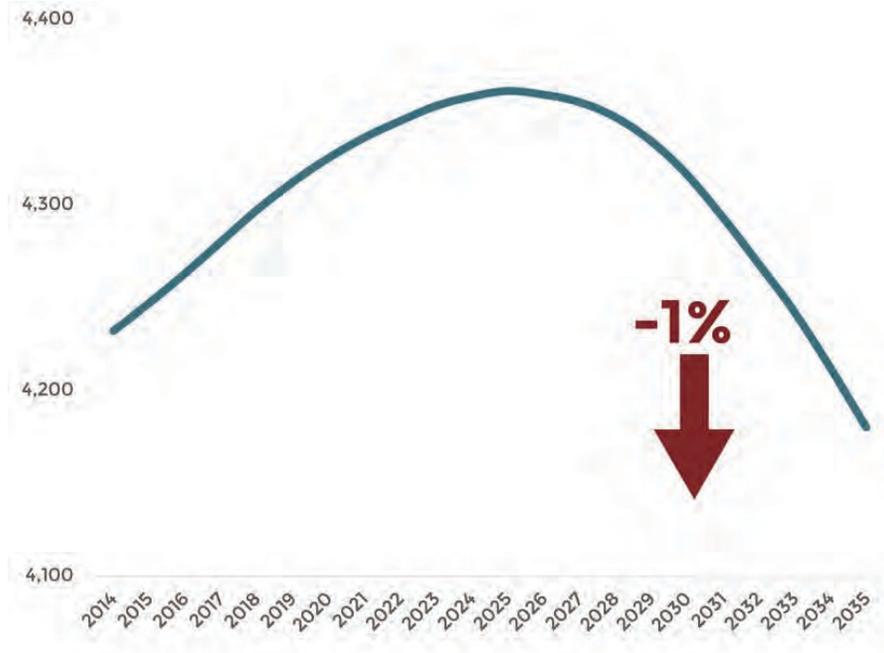


Figure 9 - Mineral County Projected Age Distribution, 2014 – 2035 (% rounded to nearest whole number)



Housing

As of 2014 there were an estimated 2,463 housing units in Mineral County, 222 and 400 of which were located in Alberton and Superior, respectively – see Table 1. Mineral County has a high percentage of vacant housing relative to the State of Montana, with 36% of all housing units being vacant as of 2014.

Table 1 - Housing Characteristics

	Montana	Mineral Co.	Alberton	Superior
Housing Units	486,782	2,463	222	400
Owner Occupied	57%	49%	58%	40%
Renter Occupied	27%	16%	23%	39%
Vacant	16%	36%	19%	21%
Single Family	72%	75%	82%	73%
Multi-Family	17%	4%	12%	17%
Mobile	11%	21%	6%	10%

Single family housing is the most common housing type in Mineral County, Alberton, and Superior, although mobile homes make up a substantial share of housing in Mineral County at 21%.

Housing Costs

In Mineral County, Alberton and Superior the median housing value (cost) is lower than the State of Montana as a whole. In Mineral County the median housing value for owner-occupied units in 2014 was estimated at approximately \$171,300 compared to the State of Montana which was \$187,600 – see Table 2.

Table 2 - Median Housing Value

Montana	\$187,600
Mineral County	\$171,300
Alberton	\$120,100
Superior	\$128,200

Figure 10 – Homeowner Costs as a Percent of Income 2014

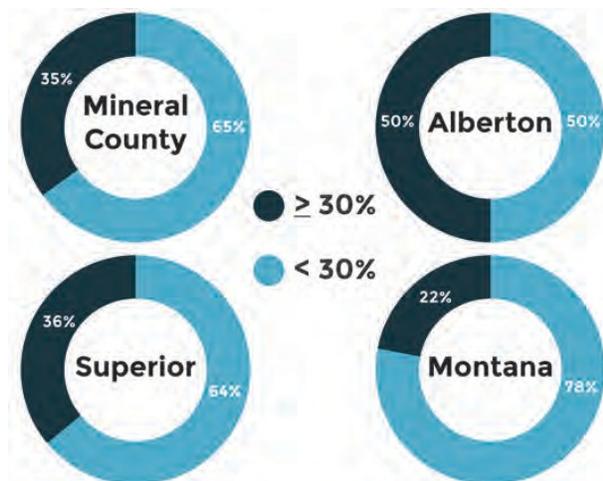
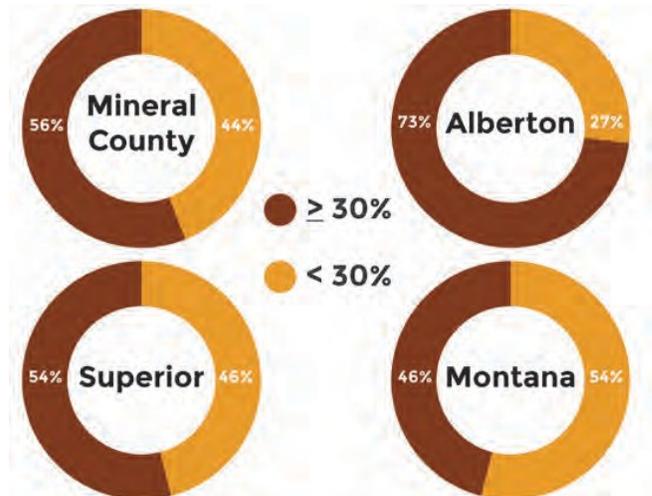


Figure 11 - Rent as a Percent of Income 2014



In order to get a better understanding of housing affordability and housing cost burden in Mineral County, it is helpful to look at housing costs as a percent of household income. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development defines housing cost burden as paying more than 30% of household income on housing. As of 2014 more than one third of homeowners in Mineral County and Superior experienced a housing cost burden, and in Alberton that figure jumps to 50% - see Figure 10.

The financial challenges are even greater for renters. In 2014, 73% of renters in Alberton experienced a housing cost burden, while 56% and 54% of respective renters in Mineral County and Superior experienced a housing cost burden – see Figure 11.⁵

Household Composition

As of 2014 there were an estimated 1,582 households in Mineral County, a slight decrease since 2000. In Alberton the number of households increased between 2000 and 2014 from 152 to 179. Superior experienced the largest decrease in number of households during this time period from 358 to 317 – see Table 3.

Table 3 - Household Composition

	Mineral County		Alberton		Superior	
	2014	Change '00-'14	2014	Change '00-'14	2014	Change '00-'14
Households (HH)	1,582	-0.1%	179	18%	317	-11%
Family HH	891	-17%	93	-15%	120	-45%
Non-Family HH	691	34%	86	100%	197	41%
HH w/ Children <18	204	-58%	37	-36%	62	-45%
HH w/ Individuals 65+	672	78%	82	290%	101	9%
Avg. HH Size	2.62	0.21*	2.66	0.20*	2.5	0.18*
Avg. Family Size	3.39	0.49*	3.68	0.80*	4.28	1.35*

*Change in the number of persons per household and family from 2000 - 2014.

Between 2000 and 2014 household composition shifted substantially, with the number of family households in Mineral County decreasing by 17% and non-family households increasing by 34%. At the same time the number of households with children under the age of 18 decreased by 58% and the number of households with an individual over the age of 65 increased by 78%. Alberton and Superior have experienced similar trends.

Similar patterns have emerged during this time period when looking at household size. Between 2000 and 2014 the share of one and two person households in Mineral County increased by 10% and 8% respectively, while the number of three and four or more person households decreased by 6% and 12% respectively – see Figure 12. Alberton saw increases in the share of one and three person households while two and four or more person households decreased – Figure 13. In Superior only the share of one person households increased during this period – Figure 14.

Figure 12 – Mineral County Change in Household Size 2000 - 2014



Figure 13 – Alberton Change in Household Size 2000 - 2014



Figure 14 – Superior Change in Household Size 2000 - 2014



Housing Needs

Although Mineral County has a reasonably ample supply of single family homes, multi-family housing, senior housing, assisted living and affordable housing seem to be lacking. Mineral County has four facilities providing below-market rate housing units: three are in Superior and one is in St. Regis. Private investment and taking advantage of public housing programs are needed to provide the types of housing that meet current and anticipated demands.

Economy

Mineral County's economy has historically been fueled by timber related industries. While timber related industries remain a vital component of Mineral County's economy, the county also has high concentrations of employment in government, retail trade, healthcare and social assistance, accommodation and food services, and construction.

Employment

Between 2005 and 2014 the total number of jobs in Mineral County decreased from 2,507 to 1,975. During this same time period Mineral County witnessed a corresponding increase in the unemployment rate from 6.1% to 9%. At the height of the recession in 2010 Mineral County's unemployment rate stood at 12.5%. By comparison the state of Montana's unemployment rate during this time period went from 4.4% to 4% and stood at 7.3% in 2010.⁶

As of 2014 the industries employing the most people in Mineral County were government, retail trade, manufacturing (including forest products), and healthcare and social assistance. With the exception of healthcare and social assistance, all of these industries experienced a decrease in employment between 2005 and 2014. The greatest employment losses were experienced in accommodation and food services, construction, and retail trade, while healthcare and social assistance and real estate, rental, and leasing experienced the largest employment gains – see Figure 15.

Wages and Earnings

Average annual wages in Mineral County increased by 50% between 2000 and 2014, although they are still well below wages for the State of Montana as a whole – see Figure 16. Average annual wages vary by industry in Mineral County. In non-service related industries and government, wages are higher than average. Wages in service related industries tend to be below the county average – see Table 4.

In terms of total earnings by industry, government, construction, and manufacturing had the highest total earnings in 2014 while farm, wholesale trade, and educational services had the lowest. Between 2005 and 2014 the greatest increases in total earnings were experienced in arts, entertainment, and recreation; administrative and waste services; and professional and technical services, while the greatest decreases were experienced in mining, educational services, and construction – see Figure 17.

Figure 15 - Change in Employment By Industry 2005 - 2014

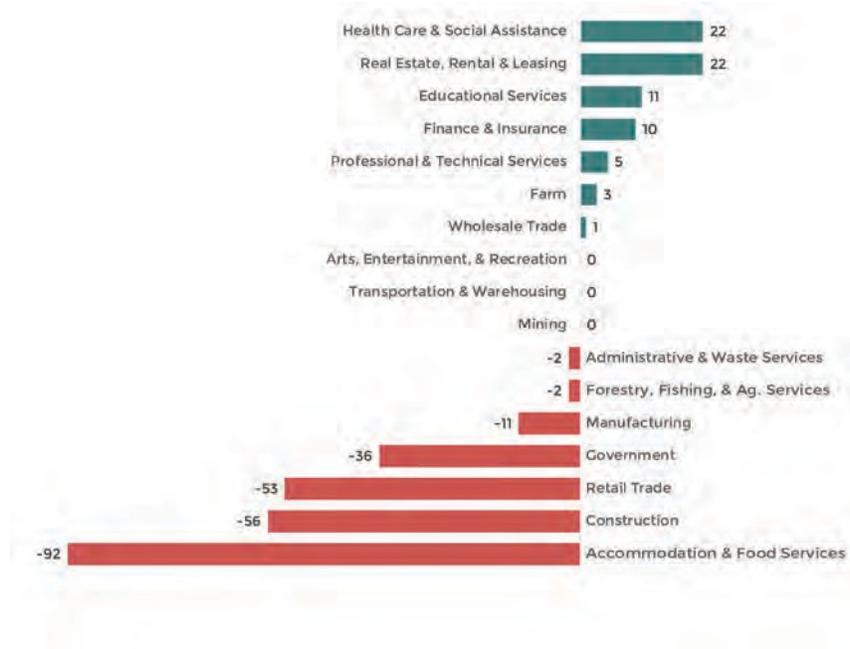


Table 4 - Average Annual Wages By Industry in Mineral County - 2014

Industry	Avg. Annual Wage	Percent Above/ Below Avg.
Total	\$28,575	0%
Private	\$27,129	-5%
Non-Services Related	\$37,091	+30%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	\$32,839	+15%
Construction	\$35,166	+23%
Services Related	\$22,356	-22%
Accommodation and Food Services	\$12,470	-56%
Administrative and Waste Services	\$36,364	+27%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	\$14,345	-50%
Finance and Insurance	\$23,797	-17%
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$31,966	+12%
Other Services	\$9,027	-68%
Professional and Technical Services	\$27,348	-4%
Retail Trade	\$19,806	-31%
Transportation and Warehousing	\$40,434	+42%
Government	\$32,750	+15%
Federal Government	\$49,410	+73%
State Government	\$39,608	+39%
Local Government	\$28,627	0%

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Figure 16 - Change in Average Annual Wage 2000 - 2014

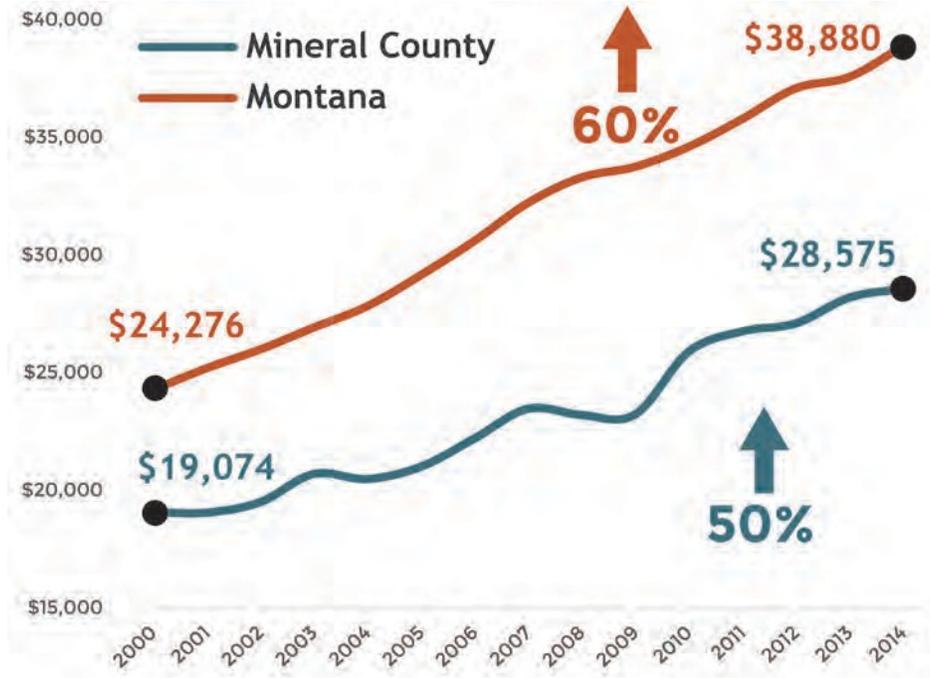
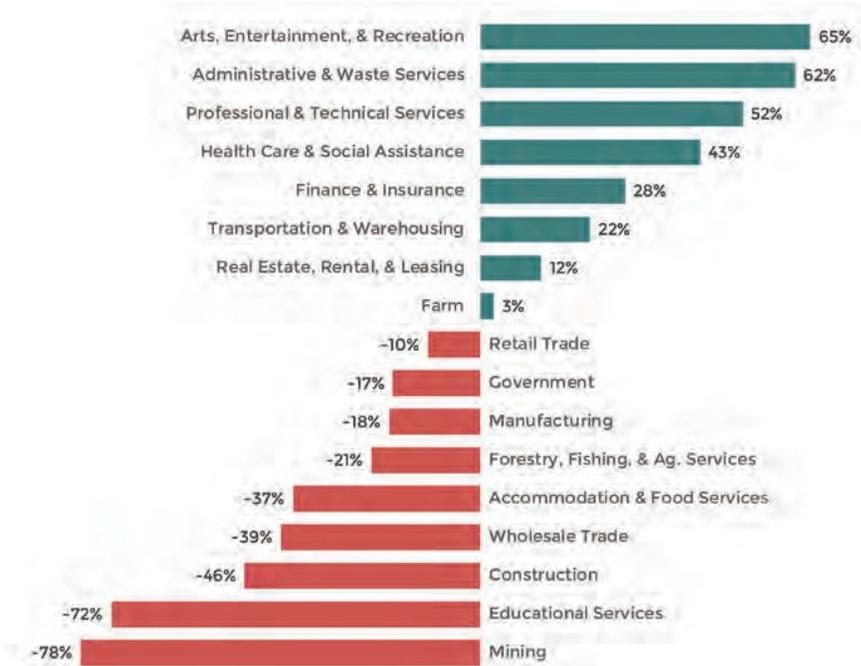


Figure 17 - Change in Earnings by Industry 2005 - 2014



Timber and Wood Products

The timber industry continues to be an important economic driver in Mineral County. Tricon Timber remains the largest private employer in Mineral County, employing around 130 people.⁷ As of 2016, employment in the timber industry represented 24% of all private employment in Mineral County at 212 jobs. The significance of this figure is highlighted by looking at the State of Montana, where timber employment represented only 1% of all private employment in 2013.⁸

In the years preceding the recession the majority of timber harvesting in Mineral County was done on private lands (primarily Plum Creek). However, the recession had a significant impact on timber harvest on private lands and beginning in 2007 timber harvests on private lands dropped substantially – see Figure 18. However, beginning in 2009, timber harvests began to increase in Mineral County stemming largely from overseas demand – see Table 6. In recent years an uptick in home starts in the U.S. has resulted in a continuing increase in timber harvest, though still about half what it was pre-recession.

As of 2014 timber harvests on private land in Mineral County outpaced harvest on both state and federal lands. However, when combining output from both state and federal lands, public lands have accounted for a slightly higher share of harvested timber in Mineral County. As of 2014 public lands accounted for 52% of the roughly 12 million board feet of timber harvested in Mineral County.

Despite recent growth in timber harvests, Mineral County lags behind comparable counties in northwest Montana. Figure 19 shows total 2014 timber harvests in thousands of board feet (MBF) for counties in northwest and western Montana. The figure shows timber harvests in all other northwest Montana counties outpace those in Mineral County, where harvest figures are more in line with those in Ravalli, Powell, and Lewis & Clark Counties.

Outlook

The recent uptick in timber harvests bodes well for the timber industry in Mineral County, despite the county lagging behind its northwestern Montana counterparts. There are several other factors that point to slight growth in the timber industry in Montana and Mineral County. A continued increase in housing starts nationwide is projected. However, stricter lending, rising interest rates and slow job growth may curtail new construction across the country.

Figure 18 - Timber Harvests in Mineral County 2002 - 2014

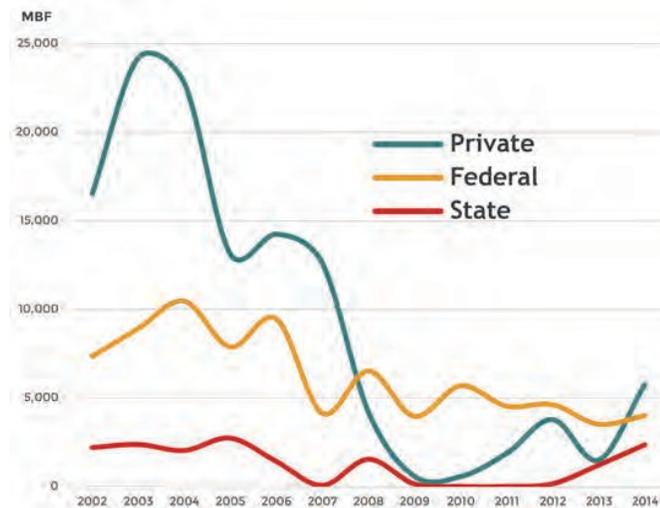
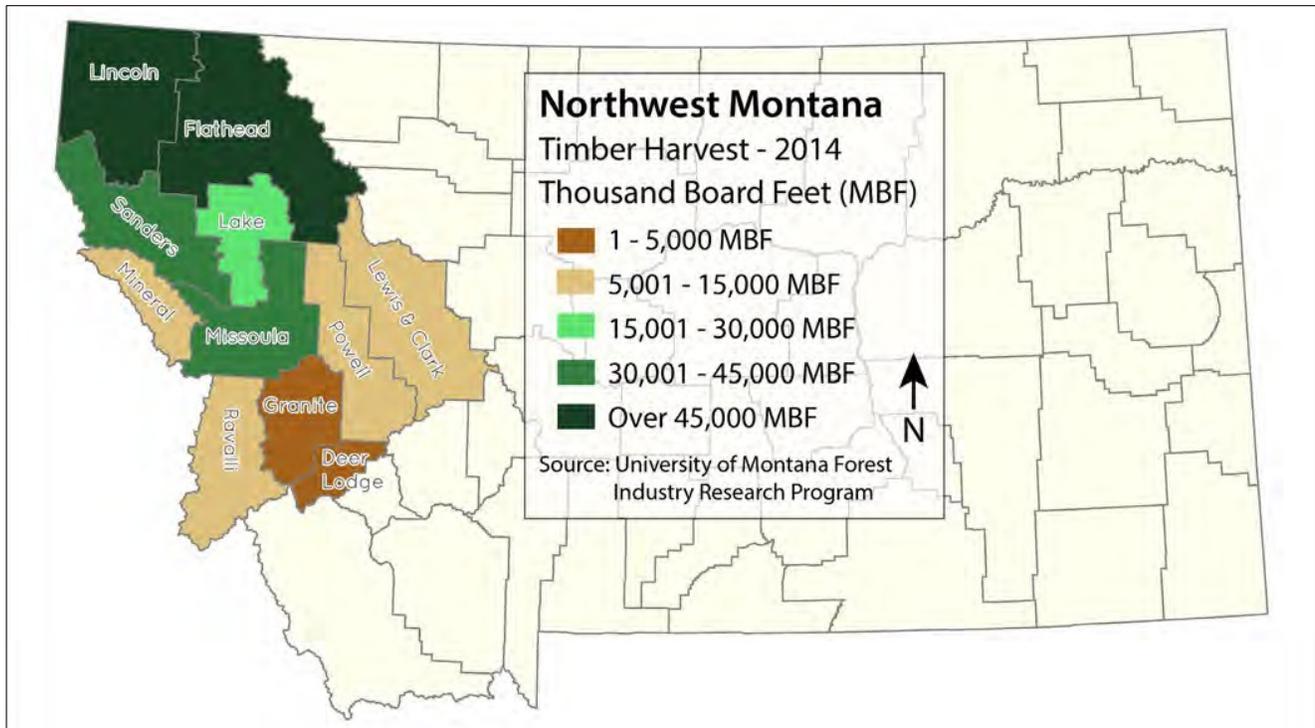


Table 5 - Mineral County Timber Harvest

	Thousands of Board Feet
2002	26,119
2003	35,519
2004	35,313
2005	23,767
2006	25,162
2007	16,817
2008	12,291
2009	4,688
2010	6,255
2011	6,418
2012	8,565
2013	6,228
2014	12,097

Housing experts state that it will still be two or more years before the nation gets back to the long-term national average of 1.4 million to 1.5 million annual new home starts.⁹ The challenges facing Montana and Mineral County regard timber availability and the ability to attract and retain employees. Attracting and retaining skilled employees has been a challenge for employers in the timber industry. Additionally, the availability of suitable rental housing is inadequate to meet demand and there is a lack of secondary jobs for spouses and partners of employees.¹⁰

Figure 19 - 2014 Timber Harvests by County - NW Montana



Current Land Use

Mineral County encompasses approximately 1,222 square miles and includes topography ranging from the grasslands of the Clark Fork River Valley to the beautiful and rugged mountains that characterize much of the county. The lowlands and benches along the river corridors are developed primarily for dry land crops with some mixed residential use, while relatively small areas in the vicinity of the principal drainages are managed for irrigated crops with some grazing and livestock production. Outside of the small towns and urban areas of Alberton, Superior, and St. Regis, non-agricultural land uses are limited to small pockets along Interstate 90 and include the communities of Cyr, Tarkio, Lozeau, De Borgia, Haugan, and Saltese. These small communities are composed of a rather inconsistent mixture of residential and commercial uses.

Land Ownership

Roughly 91% of land in Mineral County is under public ownership, the majority of which is national forest land. Private land, excluding Plum Creek land, accounts for roughly 8% of Mineral County

or 58,681 acres. Plum Creek land accounts for just over 1% of the County at 9,177 acres – see

Table 6 – Approximate Land Ownership

Table 6. Figure 20 shows the distribution of land ownership across the county. Public lands benefit Mineral County as they provide for economic opportunities in recreation, hunting and fishing, restoration work, forestry, and tourism. However, the high percentage of public lands in Mineral County results in a small tax base as private lands make up only a small

Owner	Acres	Sq. Mi.	Approx. %
U.S Forest Service	640,180	1,000	82%
State	68,211	107	9%
Private (excluding Plum Creek)	58,681	92	8%
Plum Creek	9,177	14	1%
Unclassified	5,310	8	0.7%
Local Government	506	0.8	0.06%
Total	782,065	1,222	

share of the total land area. In addition federal programs assisting communities that have large tracts of non- taxable federal lands have increased in recent years, primarily for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes, but the Secure Rural Schools funding has been decreasing and is predicted to continue to decrease. The Mineral County Road Department is funded with the Secure Rural Schools monies and no general taxes are levied for Road Department operation.

This pattern of land ownership and tax base implications are a major issue for Mineral County residents. National forests are owned by the federal government. The management priorities and goals are often very different on a national scale than on the local scale. When much of the land in an area is not used to generate economic activity, it impacts the entire area through the lack of direct and indirect employment. Timber harvests on federal lands are small in comparison to what they were in the 1970s stemming from changes in forest policy at the national level. As a result of decreasing timber receipts, the Forest Service has been in the process of decommissioning roads once used for logging. While Mineral County recognizes the financial constraints contributing to the Forest Service decommissioning roads, the county’s preference is to keep forest roads open to provide for public access to Forest Service lands.

Agriculture

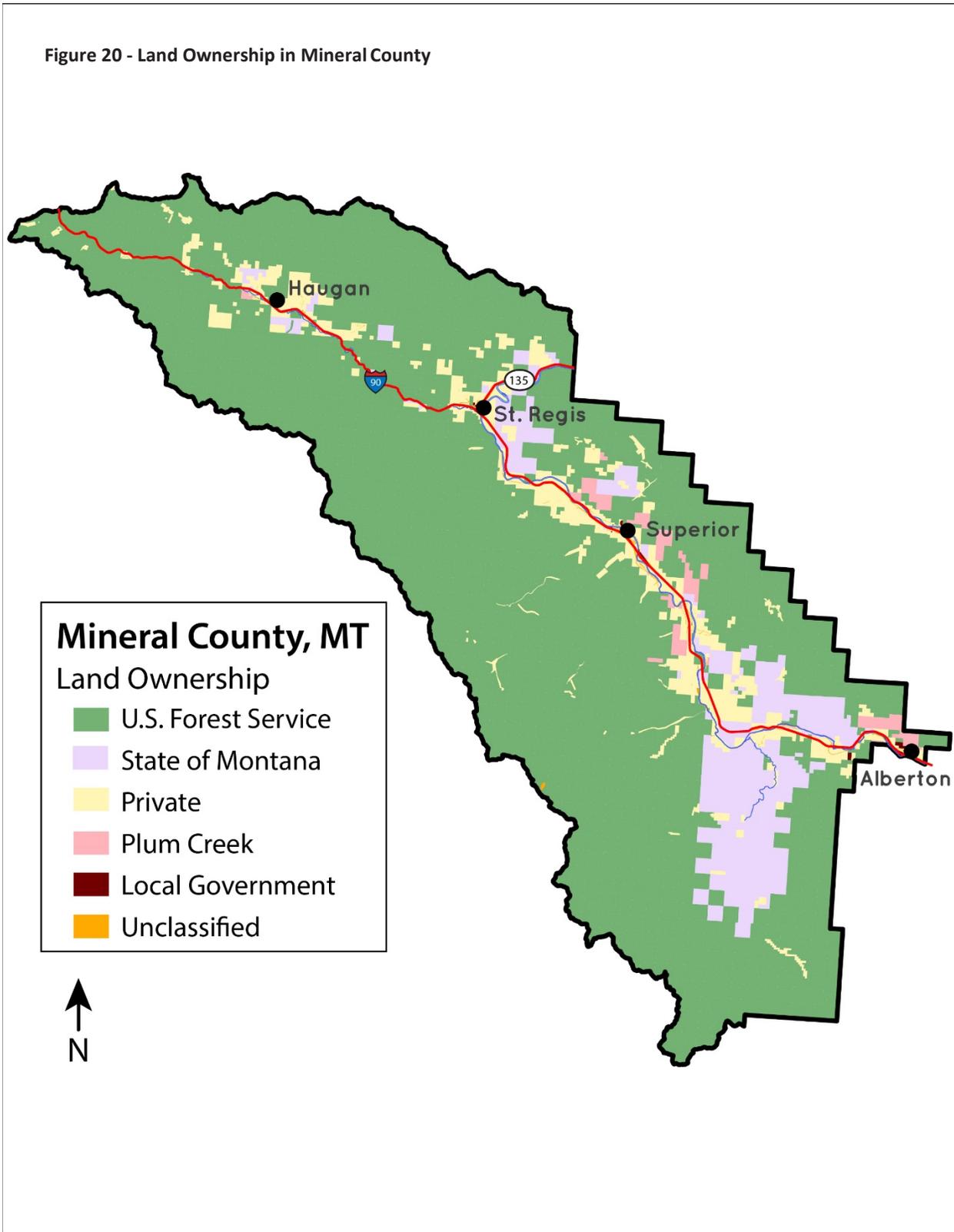
Agriculture in the form of farming and ranching is limited in Mineral County and has been decreasing in recent years. As of 2012 there were 95 farms operating in Mineral County covering 17,049 acres, a decrease since 2007 when there were 99 farms in operation covering 22,654 acres.¹¹ The top crops in Mineral County include, hay forage, wheat, and barley.¹² Agricultural activity is distributed along the Clark Fork River Valley. Mineral County is open range for cattle.

Residential Development

Residential development in Mineral County is centered along Interstate 90 in nine communities including Alberton, Cyr, Tarkio, Lozeau, Superior, St. Regis, De Borgia, Haugan, and Saltese. The incorporated towns of Alberton and Superior and the community of St. Regis have the highest concentration of development. Outside of these areas development is generally located within one to two miles of the Clark Fork River where the majority of private land is located. Despite the declining acreage, agriculture is very important to Mineral County and should be supported. It provides locally grown food and fiber, which is efficient in terms of resource use and also provides

a degree of security. Agriculture also contributes to the area’s scenic beauty, which is one of Mineral County’s selling points when new residents and businesses consider locating here. Finally, agriculture is part of our heritage and culture, which should be supported.

Figure 20 - Land Ownership in Mineral County



Commercial Development

Commercial development in Mineral County has at least some presence in each of the communities along Interstate 90, but is primarily concentrated in the towns of Alberton and Superior, and the community of St. Regis. In these communities several commercial properties are available at reasonable prices, providing good opportunities for entrepreneurs. Commercial uses in the communities of Cyr, Tarkio, DeBorgia, Haugan, and Saltese are generally smaller establishments that cater to the convenience needs of the community. Restaurants, bars, service stations and small specialty businesses of rafting and fishing guide services and repair shops generally represent the extent of commercial development in the rural communities of the county, while commercial outfitters are located or operate in more remote locations of Mineral County. The trend in Mineral County for dependence on large scale retail services available in the neighboring regional cities of Missoula and Spokane will continue to have a significant effect on commercial expansion within the county.

Industrial Development

Industrial uses in Mineral County are primarily related to timber and mineral extraction and are located along the railroad and main transportation routes of Interstate 90 and Montana Highway 135. The Montana Rail Link corridor in the Alberton, Superior and St. Regis areas provides ample space for the location of light industrial uses including timber processing, shipping facilities, and a variety of other uses. The Superior airport also provides potential industrial space and 3-phase power.

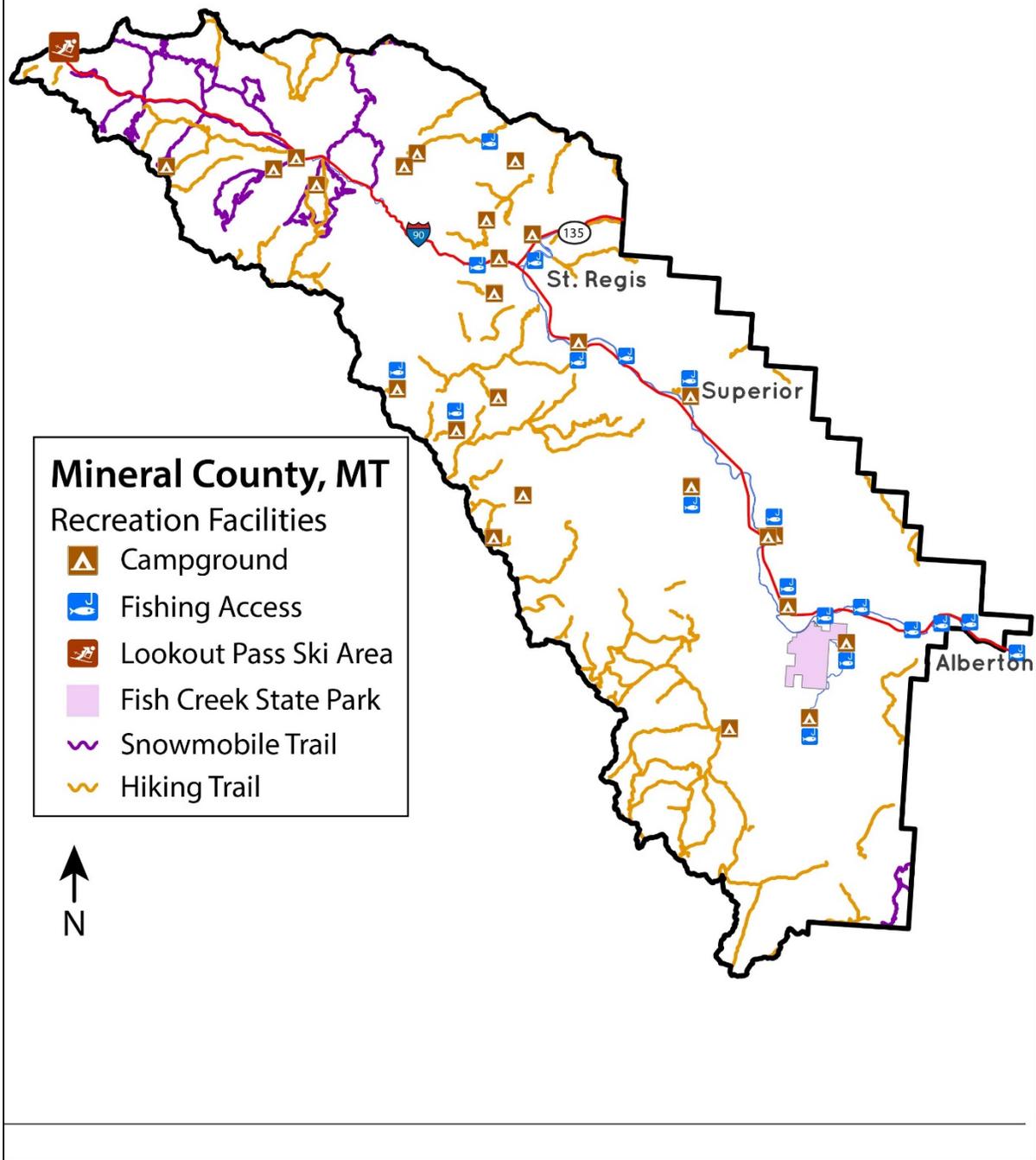
Public Uses

The primary public uses in Mineral County are centered in the county seat of Superior. Alberton and St. Regis provide access to local government functions at town hall buildings, and there are several rural community centers in the county that support local public uses serving the basic fire safety and child education needs. Outside of Alberton and Superior, public facilities are primarily recreational use facilities managed by state and federal land management agencies, and county facilities used by the county Road Department for operations and storage of maintenance equipment. The State Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks provides developed fishing access sites for public use on the Clark Fork River. Mineral County is located within the Lolo National Forest, with the Superior and Nine Mile Ranger Districts having management responsibilities for the national forest lands in the county.

Recreation

With over 90% of the county in public ownership, Mineral County is an outdoor enthusiast's dream. Fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, ATV riding, skiing, hiking, rafting, and mountain biking, are all available to residents and visitors. Figure 21 displays recreation sites and amenities in Mineral County. The Clark Fork River runs 58 miles through Mineral County, with recreational floating and fishing being important resources for the local and regional economy. This section of river includes the Alberton Gorge, a 10-mile section popular among whitewater rafters and kayakers, which gets used by upwards of 30,000 floaters every year.

Figure 21 - Recreation Sites in Mineral County



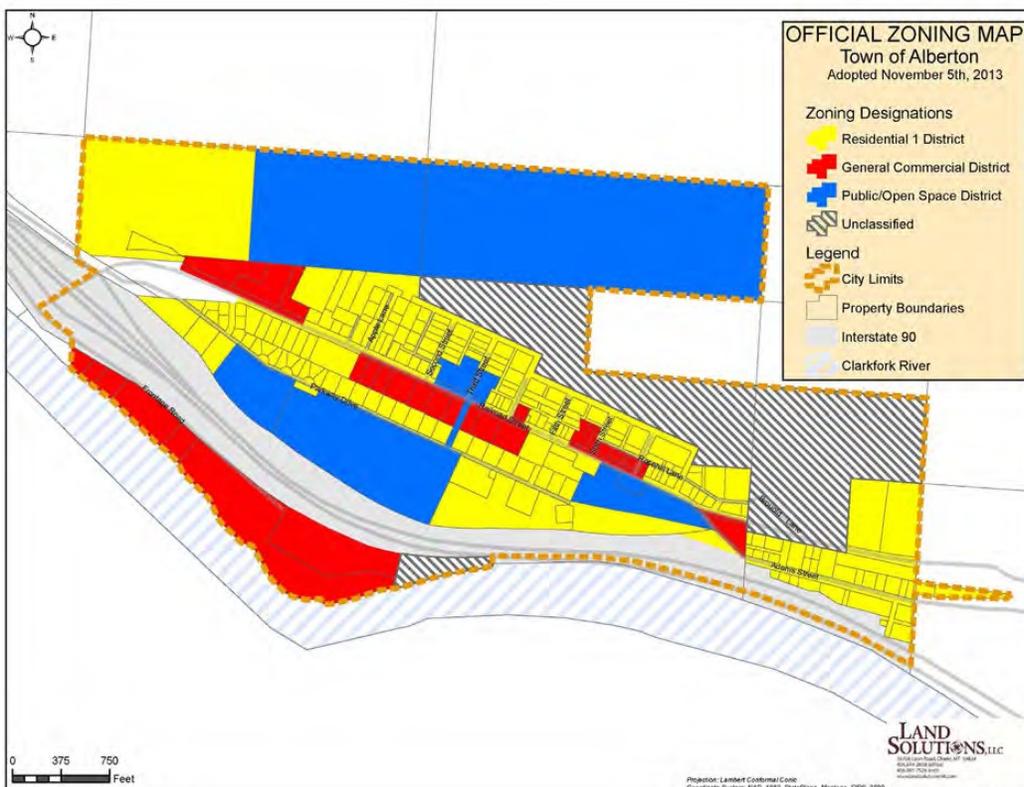
In terms of recreation on public lands, the Lolo National Forest manages over 640,000 acres of forest lands in Mineral County, roughly 1/3 of which are inventoried roadless areas (areas without roads that could be suitable for wilderness designation). The Great Burn is a popular area. There are 25 campgrounds in Mineral County operated by the Lolo National Forest and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP). Between the Lolo National Forest and FWP there are 15 fishing access sites in Mineral County, six with boat launching facilities.

On the western edge of Mineral County is Lookout Pass ski area offering over 500 acres of terrain for skiers and snowboarders. Lookout Pass is currently in the process of expanding into the St. Regis basin, adding roughly 700 acres of skiable terrain, which Mineral County supports. The Lookout Pass expansion is currently going through the National Environmental Protection Act process to evaluate environmental impacts. If this expansion is completed it will likely bring many more users to Lookout Pass, which currently receives around 60,000 visitors a year. Mineral County is also very popular for snowmobiling and cross country skiing, with over 120 miles of Forest Service trails. Back country skiing is also growing in popularity. As winter use increases, additional resources for Mineral County Search and Rescue may become necessary. Additional parking for recreational uses (possibly at Taft) is also needed.

Zoning

Zoning regulates the density and types of land uses that are permitted on a property. Currently, Alberton is the only area in Mineral County with adopted zoning. The zoning map (Figure 22) shows the three zoning districts within the current zoning jurisdiction of the Town of Alberton.

Figure 22 - Alberton Zoning Map



Future Land Use

This section illustrates a vision for the future development of rural Mineral County, the towns of Alberton and Superior, and the community of St. Regis. It is an expression of desired community development patterns that also acknowledges and builds from the existing development patterns. The future land use maps for Mineral County (Figures 23 and 24), Alberton (Figure 25), Superior (Figure 26), and St. Regis (Figure 27) reflect the interests of the County and Towns in providing for efficient and cost effective growth and development by taking advantage of public investments in infrastructure; providing for public health and safety; conserving vital natural resource values, and avoiding unnecessary environmental degradation and hazards.

The future land use maps and text do not regulate land use proposals, but serve as a guide for development. Thus the land use classifications are not as specific as zoning designations. Instead, the land use classifications are intended to be generalized to allow for flexibility and are to be used with discretion.

General Categories

Mineral County Rural Area

Mineral County intends to conserve forest and agricultural lands as the primary economic resources of the county in areas where timber harvesting and agricultural activities have historically occurred. These areas deserve support in maintaining and managing farming and ranching activities and timber production, with allowances for limited residential development, which may include home occupations. Growth in the existing unincorporated population centers and in their immediate vicinities is encouraged within the context of small rural townsites or villages. These rural communities include Saltese, Haugan, De Borgia, Lozeau, and Cyr.

Mineral County Urban Areas

The towns of Alberton and Superior and the community of St. Regis (a Census Designated Place with sewer, resort and lighting districts) comprise the urban areas in Mineral County. It is the intention of this plan to foster future development and re-development in and around these population centers. New development is expected to be created in a manner that is compatible with, is complementary to, and reflects the character of existing development. Development that also reflects the needs of the communities as described in this Growth Policy, and is respectful of existing development and makes use of existing infrastructure, is encouraged.

The limitations imposed by the Clark Fork and St. Regis River floodplains, as well as surrounding steep slopes, are recognized as some of the most important variables in planning for growth and improvements in these communities. The urban areas are characterized by a mixture of small town residential, commercial, industrial, public, agricultural, recreational, and resource use, each with important community functions and values. Our communities are committed to protecting and improving upon these valuable resources while providing for future growth of the communities according to a plan that reflects the vision of the local population.

Specific Land Use Classifications

The following are definitions of each of the classifications found on the future land use maps:

Urban Residential

Areas suitable for development with a mix of single family, multi-family, and mobile housing. These areas include previously developed residential neighborhoods near existing downtowns and some previously platted land in the perimeter areas of established communities. Urban residential neighborhoods should be systematically improved through a public improvements program that includes paving streets where appropriate, installing sidewalks, providing adequate storm drainage facilities and planting trees along streets. Specific areas adjacent to downtown areas should be improved by gradually introducing limited, mixed use development that will help to promote efficient use of the downtown properties. This gradual “in filling” and reinvestment process should be undertaken with measures designed to protect the livability and economic viability of the existing residential and commercial properties. All new residential subdivisions should be designed and developed to be efficiently served by public infrastructure and facilities.

Rural Residential

Tracts suitable for low density, suburban type development served by “on lot” or privately owned water and sewage disposal systems. Planned Unit Developments may be suitable for specific sites within this unit pending evaluation of environmental and community impacts.

Rural Community

Rural communities offer a semirural living environment with a limited range of urban services. The communities of Saltese, Haugan, De Borgia, Lozeau, and Cyr are included in this definition. This classification permits a restricted range of small scale urban activities including residential densities that coincide with the existing area densities, commercial, and light industrial uses commensurate with the ability to provide necessary services to the local population and passers by. Institutional, recreational, and light industrial uses may be permitted on a limited basis.

It is the intent of this plan that development in each of these areas be encouraged in order to promote the location of future growth near existing communities and public services. Development in these rural communities should follow county design standards that promote public safety, provision of efficient and beneficial public infrastructure, and compatibility with existing land uses. All new development should minimize negative impacts on adjacent properties, and implementation measures should be adopted for each area to direct growth according to a set of design and development standards. Impacts caused by connection to the existing public sewer and/or water system must be taken into account before additional development is approved. Proposals for installation of individual sewer and water facilities where negative impacts may result are discouraged.

General Commercial

Areas where general commercial uses are established and expected to continue as well as areas for preferred commercial development in the future. These areas should be confined to land in and adjacent to existing business districts and in areas adjacent to highways and arterials in Mineral County. Development in these areas is expected to be architecturally attractive, using natural materials and colors with signage of limited size, and reflective of the community’s history and culture. Development in these areas may also include multi-family and mixed use development.

Industrial

Areas which will allow a broad range of uses and afford greater opportunity for basic sector jobs close to community centers and within reasonable travel distance to residential and basic services. Existing and new development should expect to accommodate commercial enterprise in this area. The two major industrial sites are the Tricon Lumber Mill and Big Sky Forest Products near St. Regis and the former Diamond Match Mill site where recently a bark plant and wood pellet mill have been in operation.

Open Unit

A land use unit covering the rural area of the county. Policies in these areas promote timber and agricultural operations, conservation, and other related activities. This unit emphasizes resource use and conservation of open spaces, soil and water resources, timber resources, grazing and croplands, wildlife resources, and the agricultural lifestyle and economy of the county. These areas provide for residential development consistent with agricultural or natural resource recovery operations, and permits rural residential development that does not have negative consequences to adjacent agricultural operations and other activities. Large scale resource oriented development may be allowed in certain areas of the county within this unit subject to identification of associated impacts and completion of a public input process followed by Planning Board review and governing body approval if review is applicable.

Local Government

Land under local government ownership that may be used for a variety of purposes including hospitals, schools and government uses, and with an emphasis on parks. The St. Regis Community Park would benefit from obtaining additional Forest Service property on the west side of the park to compliment the service building built close to the boundary. The primary need is for additional parking area. The Mineral County Search and Rescue organization has recently obtained property on Diamond Match Road and is actively investigating the possibility of construction of a building to store and maintain vehicles and equipment.

State of Montana

Land owned by the state of Montana that may be used for timber harvest, grazing, recreation and hunting. State owned land recently increased from 2.8 to 9 percent of the county. The majority of the increase is due to the acquisition of Fish Creek property both for a Wildlife Management Area and large state park area.

U.S. Forest Service

Land owned by the U.S. Forest Service that may be used primarily for the extraction of natural resources such as timber harvest is of vital importance. The national forest is also an important recreational asset for Mineral County. Balancing the benefits of recreation to area businesses versus the impacts on emergency services such as the Sheriff's Office, ambulance, Search and Rescue and the Road Department under Schedule A road maintenance agreement is facilitated by stable funding under the federal Payment in Lieu of Taxes and Secure Rural School funding. Recreational hunting has experienced a significant decline in the last decade with the colonization of big game predators. Wolves have directly caused declines in big game populations. Mineral County's historical elk population supported hundreds of cow elk tags being available but have been, in recent years, reduced to less than 100 permits within the county. This has created additional pressure on bull elk populations as resident hunters compete for fewer and fewer mature bulls. A very similar scenario can be applied to deer populations.

Figure 23 - Mineral County West Future Land Use Map

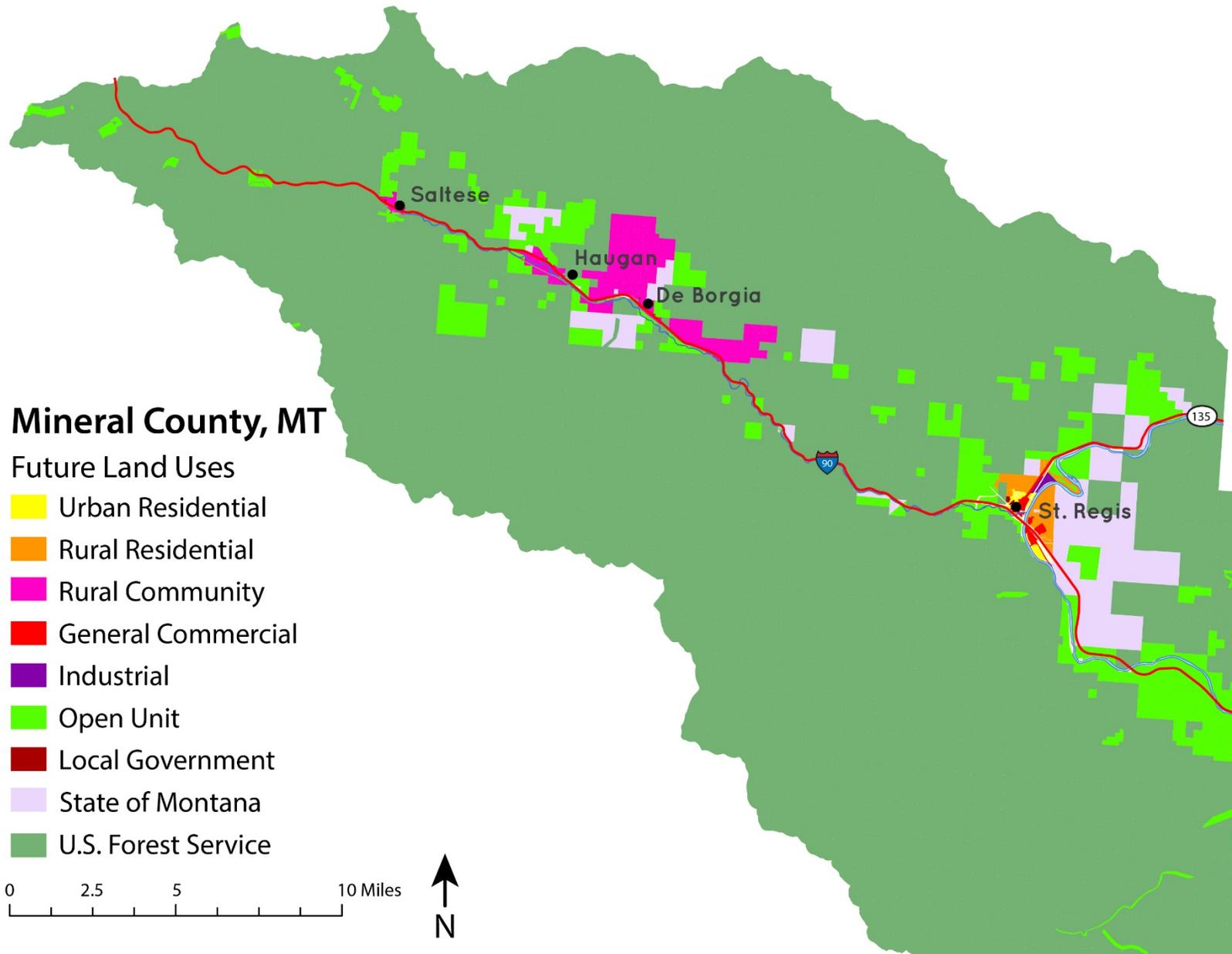


Figure 24 - Mineral County East Future Land Use Map

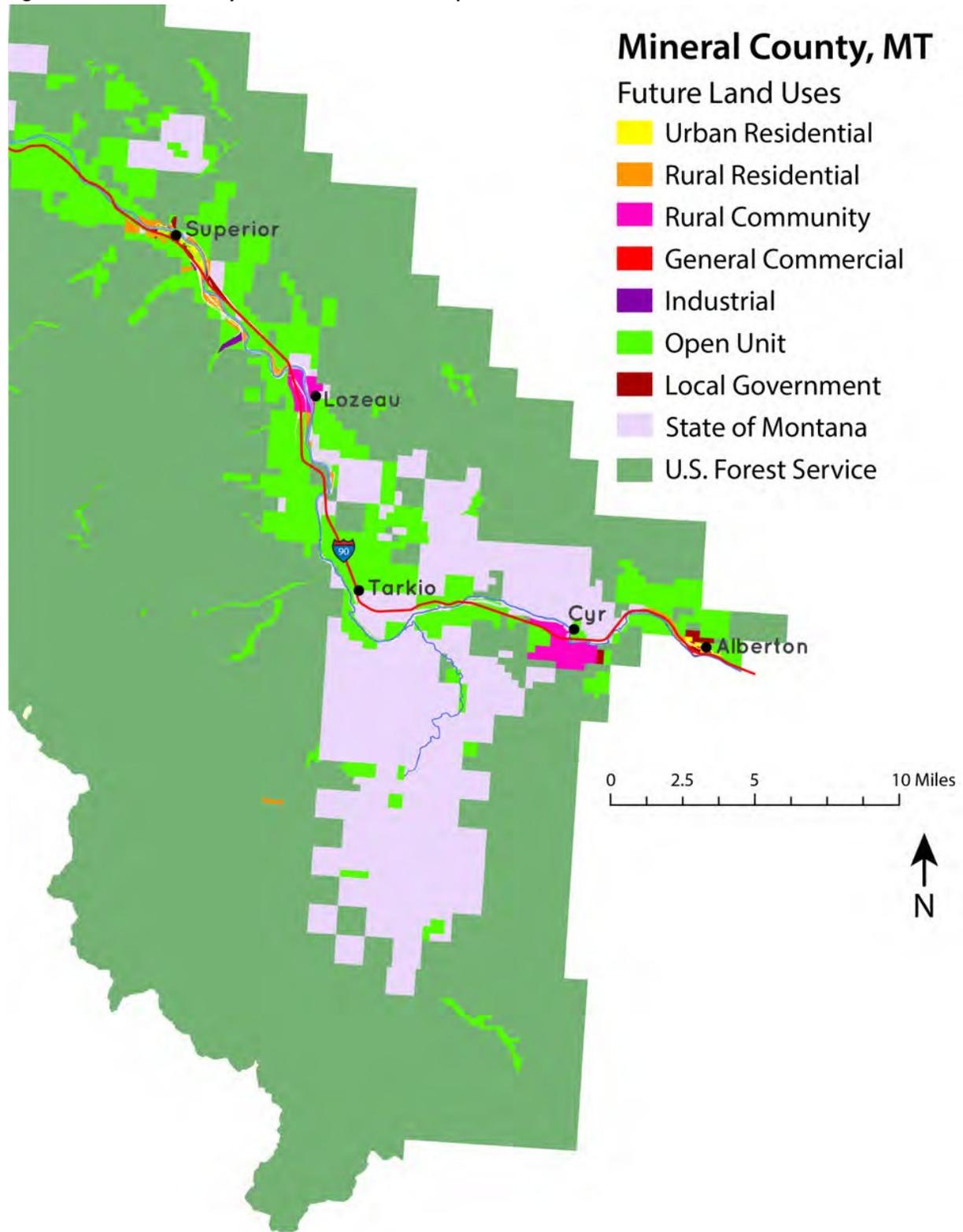


Figure 25 - Alberton Future Land Use Map

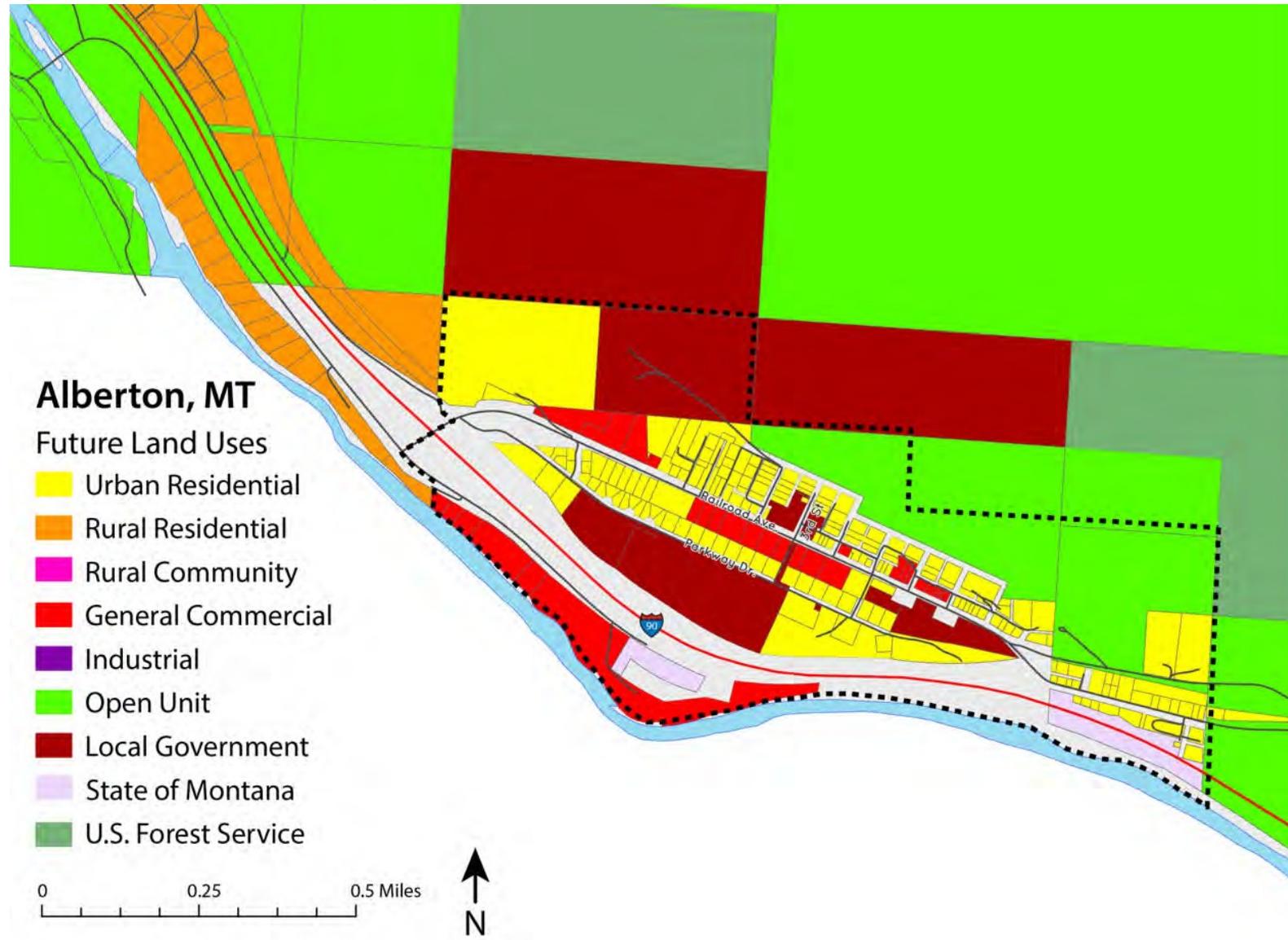


Figure 26 - Superior Future Land Use Map

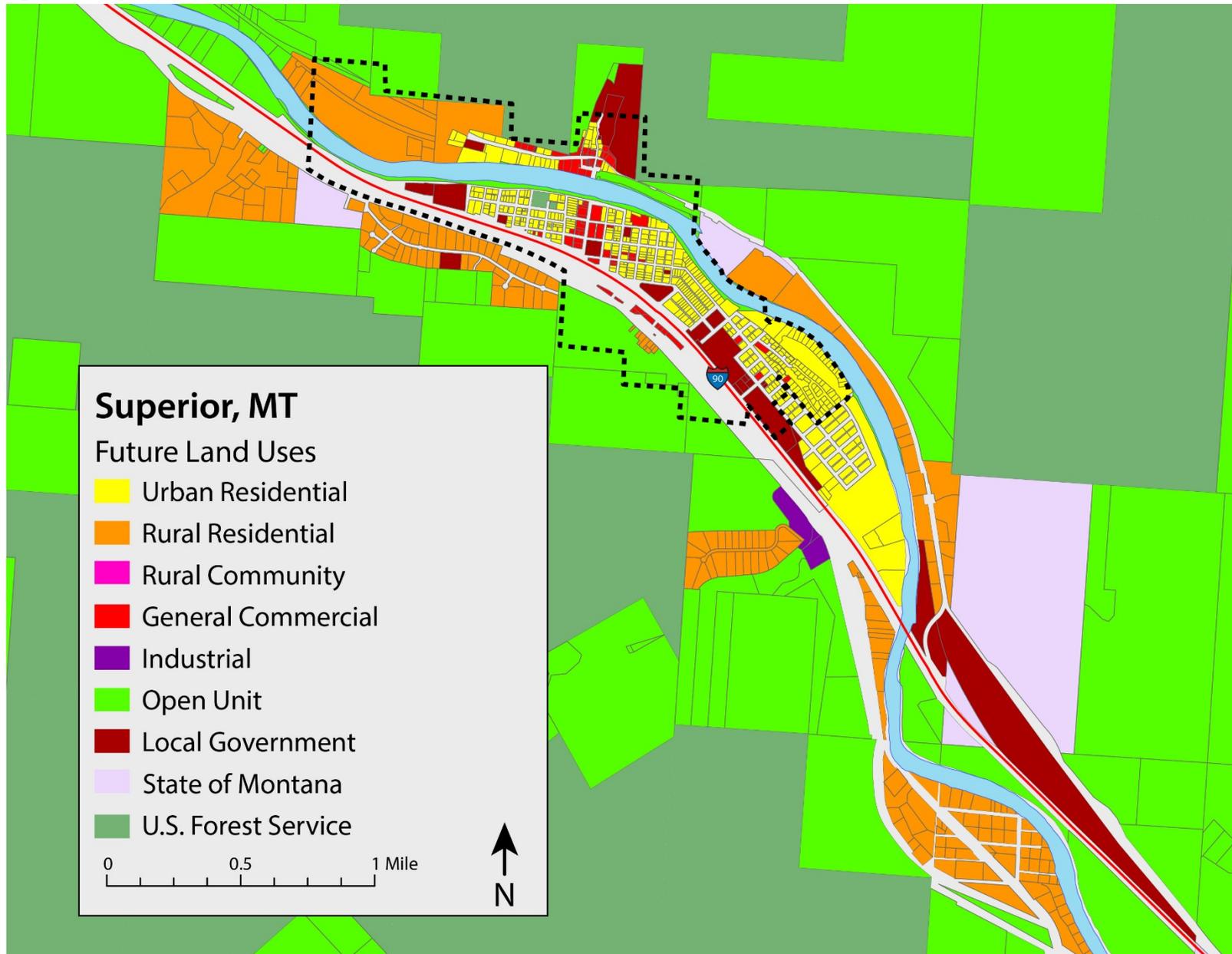
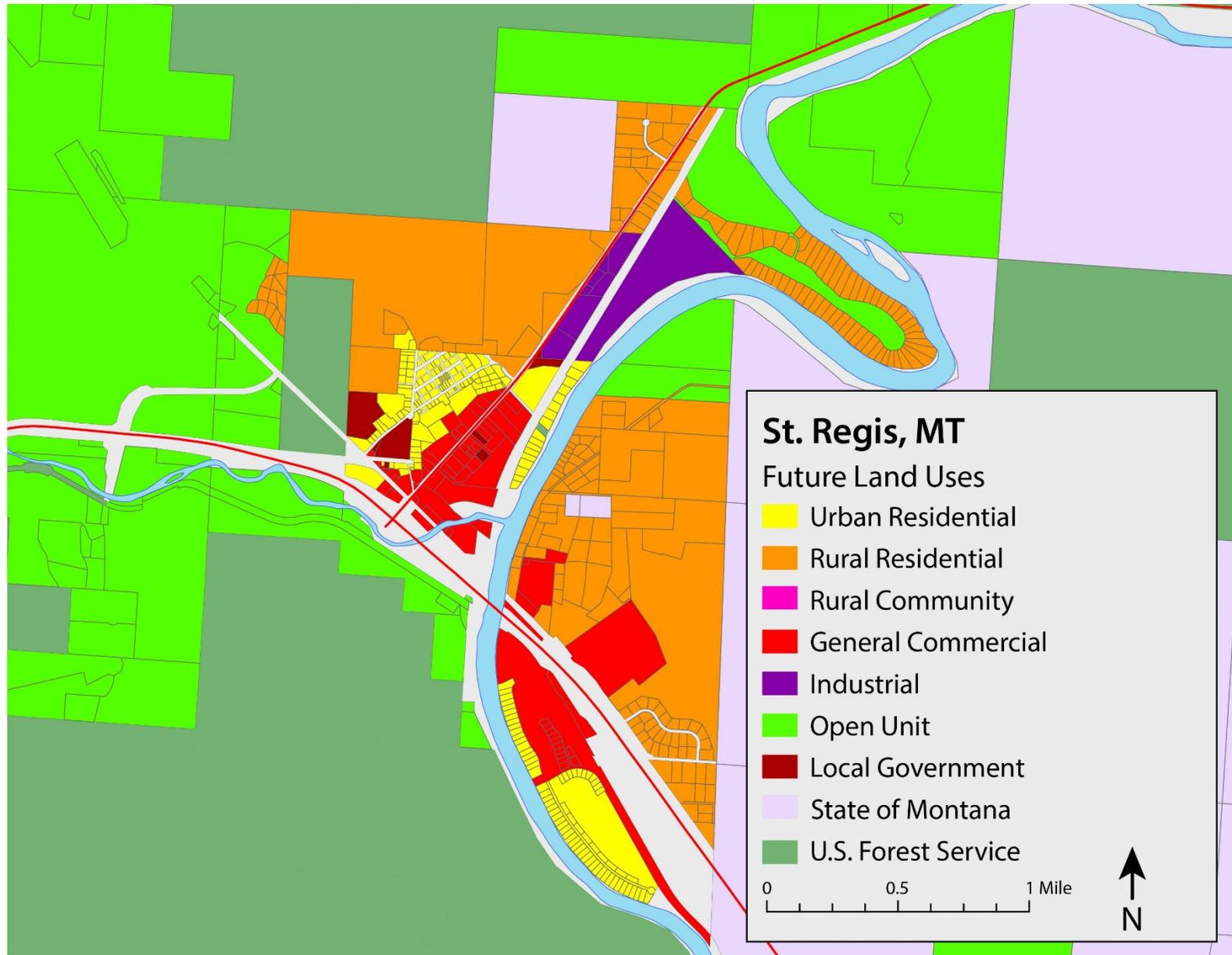


Figure 27 - St. Regis Future Land Use Map



Local Services

Law Enforcement and Crime

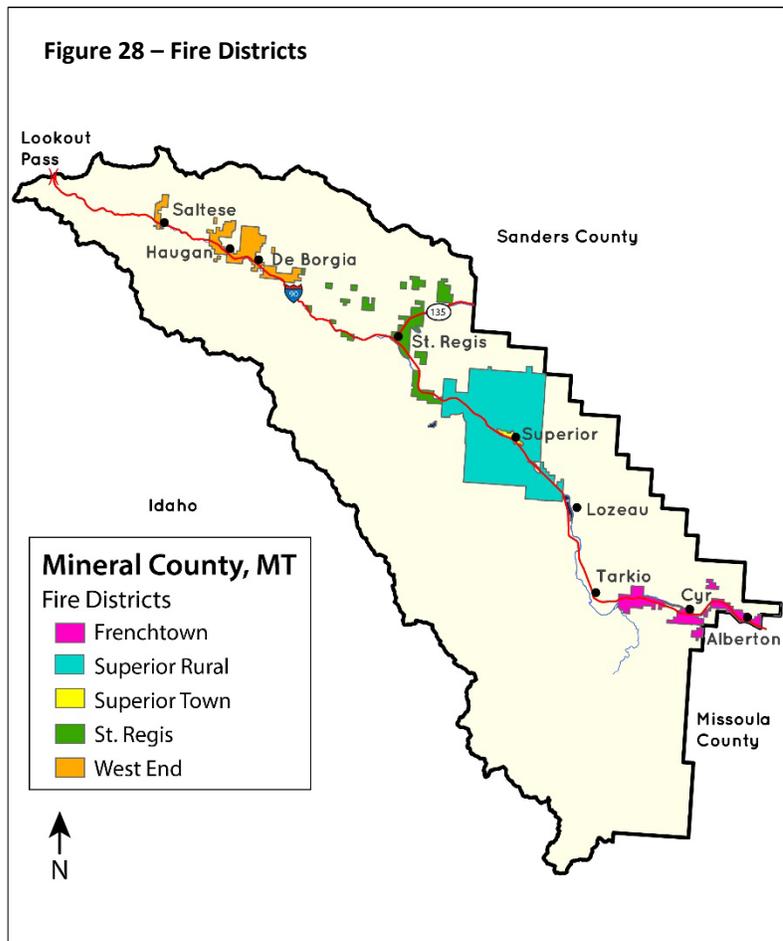
The Mineral County Sheriff’s and Coroner’s Office is the primary law enforcement agency covering all of Mineral County. The Sheriff’s Office also serves the towns of Alberton and Superior. The Montana Highway Patrol provides traffic enforcement and accident investigation on State highways. Search and Rescue is a function of the Sheriff’s Office utilizing volunteers to conduct river rescues, locate missing persons, and assist law enforcement in evacuations.

Fire Protection

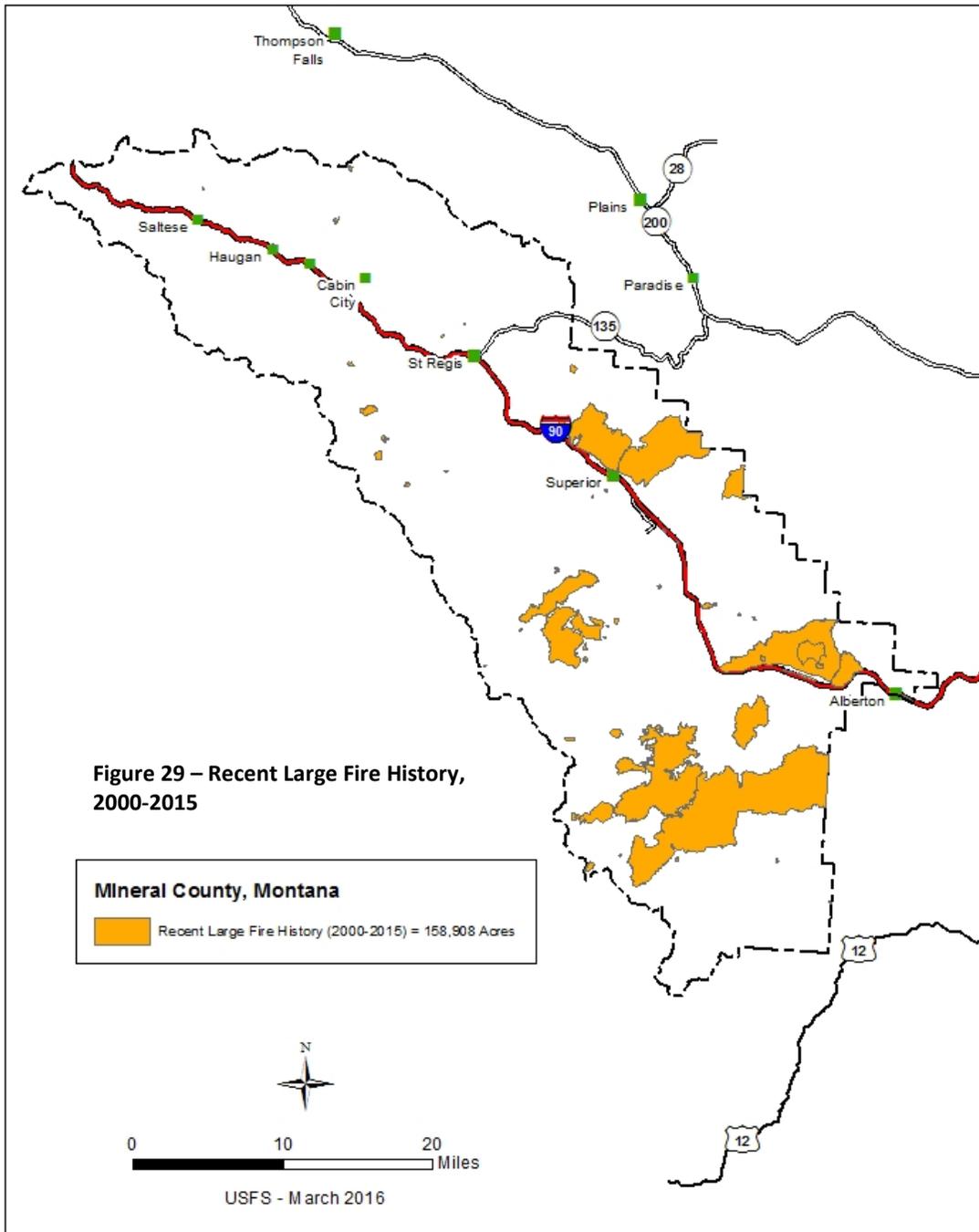
Mineral County’s fire protection units are centered in four districts (Figure 28). They include the Superior Fire Districts (urban and rural); Frenchtown (covering Alberton); St. Regis; and the West End rural fire department.

Concern has been voiced that fire protection in the Mineral County portion of the Frenchtown District is not adequate and the taxes sent to the Frenchtown District do not proportionally benefit Mineral County landowners

The Lolo National Forest is responsible for fire protection on national forest lands, which encompass most of the county. A Cooperative Fire Management Annual Operating Plan is in effect between the U.S. Forest Service, state agencies and Mineral County fire districts to provide for coordinated fire suppression responses in the urban interface areas.



Much of Mineral County is forested and wildfires are a fact of life in western Montana. In Mineral County alone, from 2000 – 2015 almost 159,000 acres burned in forest fires (Figure 29). Mineral County and the towns of Alberton and Superior strongly support efforts by all fire protection agencies to protect life and property. As needs for manpower, training, facilities, supplies and equipment become evident, the three local governments plan to make these needs priorities and hope to help the Lolo National Forest Ranger Districts and other agencies accomplish their missions.

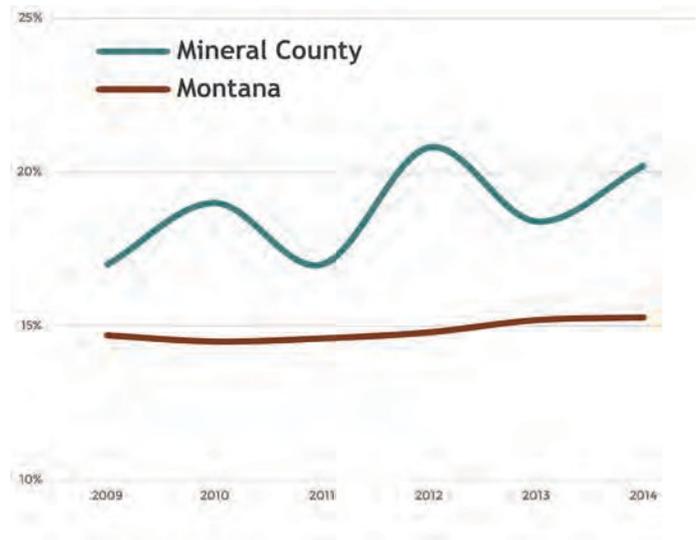


Social Services

A variety of government, private, and non-profit entities provide food, housing, transportation, child care, and healthcare services for seniors and low income individual in Mineral County. An office of the Human Resource Council is located in Superior. The Human Resource Council is a non-profit organization that works to help low-income residents connect with social services for housing, health, education, training, and employment.

Mineral County has a high percentage of the population living in poverty relative to the State of Montana. Between 2009 and 2014, the percentage of the population in poverty increased from 17% to 20% -

Figure 30 - Percent of Population in Poverty



see Figure 30. During this same time period the percentage of the population living in poverty in Montana stayed relatively constant at around 15%. These figure highlight the continued need for Mineral County to continue its partnerships with public, private and non-profit actors to address the needs of low income and senior populations.

Medical Services

Mineral County is served by the Mineral Community Hospital in Superior, Partnership Health Center – Mineral County in Superior, and Jack Lincoln Memorial Clinic in St. Regis. The hospital staffs 70 people including physicans, physician’s assistants, nurses, and support staff to provide emergency, acute care, and long-term care services. Partnership Health Center – Mineral County and Jack Lincoln Memorial Clinic provide clinic physician and physician assistant services to county residents. Emergency medical services are provided by basic life support ambulance units located in DeBorgia, St. Regis, and Superior.

Education

Public education in Mineral County is provided through three school districts that serve the areas of Alberton, Superior and St. Regis, including each of their respective surrounding areas. St. Regis School District No. 1 serves a current enrollment of 154 students from kindergarten through grade twelve. Alberton School District No. 2 serves a current enrollment of 144 students from kindergarten through grade twelve. Superior School District No. 3 serves a current enrollment of 283 students from kindergarten through grade twelve.

Enrollment in all three districts has decreased over the last 15 years – see

Figure 31 - Mineral County School Enrollment

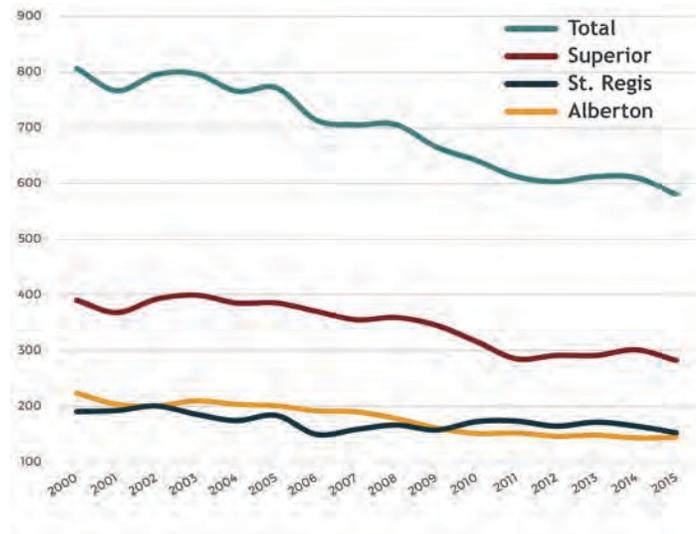


Figure 31. In total public school enrollment in Mineral County dropped by 285 between 2000 and 2015, which has led to the consolidation of some sports programs.

Libraries and Museums

Mineral County has libraries located in Alberton, Superior and St. Regis. Mineral County has two museums, both of which are privately funded. The museum in Superior operates under the direction of a historical society that has over 100 members. Alberton's museum is operated by dedicated volunteers and relies on donations for funding.

Solid Waste

Republic Services provides garbage pickup and transfer to its landfill in Missoula. Republic Services provides class three waste disposal at the site of the transfer station. Solid waste disposal is an issue of concern to the citizens of Mineral County. Solid waste disposal through illegal means occurs throughout the rural area of Mineral County. Low income families may not use available waste disposal services due to cost.

Telephone and Internet Services

The Blackfoot Telecommunications Company provides phone and internet services through a fiber optic route that follows Interstate 90 and Highway 135. Telephone and internet subscribers have over 1,900 connections in Mineral County. High speed internet presently serves schools in Alberton, Superior and St. Regis as well as the Mineral Community Hospital. Blackfoot Telecommunications is embarking on an aggressive plan to replace dated, less functional lines with current technology fiber optic to increase internet quality to residents.

Power

NorthWestern Energy serves the central and western portions of Mineral County. NorthWestern provides service to over 2,100 service connections in the DeBorgia, Haugan, St. Regis, Saltese, Superior and Taft areas. Missoula Electric Cooperative serves the eastern 1/3 of the county.

Public Facilities

Water Systems

Public water systems providing for potable water and fire protection needs have been primarily developed from groundwater sources to serve residents in the towns of Alberton and Superior and the community of St. Regis. Non-community public water systems operating in Mineral County include West Mountain Estates, Trestle Creek, Old Mill Peninsula, and Deer Lick among others. Except for these small public systems, and those that have been constructed to serve commercial establishments, campgrounds and trailer courts, water supply in the rural areas of the county and in each of the small unincorporated communities is provided by individual groundwater wells. The following summaries are of community water systems in the towns of Alberton and Superior.

Town of Alberton

Alberton's water distribution system serves approximately 200 service connections within the town limits. The system is comprised of 7.5 miles of 6 and 8-inch mains. There are 18 fire hydrants which are maintained by the Public Works Department. The majority of the system is metered and the water system also includes a 300,000 gallon storage tank.

The Town of Alberton Water Treatment Plant provides water to the residents of the town. The water treatment facility was originally constructed in 1940 and renovated in 1968 to address the need for increased capacity and replacement of worn or outdated equipment. The treatment facility draws water from a well and a spring through an infiltration gallery. The water is treated using clarification, filtration and disinfection processes for treatment. Alberton's water system is old and in need of facility improvements to replace old and undersized mains and other priorities.

Town of Superior

Superior's water is supplied by three wells that draw water from the aquifer on the south side of the Clark Fork River, serving roughly 415 connections. The previous source of Superior's water supply was Flat Creek, though use of this water supply was discontinued in 1997 due to high levels of antimony. All three wells are located within the town limits and each has its own treatment plant. The wells are connected to a 400,000 gallon reservoir for storage. The water distribution system

is comprised of 2-inch through 12-inch mains. Superior recently completed major improvement to the town's water distribution system including replacement of old and undersized mains and adding new fire hydrants. The Town of Superior recently received a grant to map the town's water and wastewater infrastructure which will help with asset management going forward.

Wastewater Treatment

The only public municipal type wastewater treatment systems are in the towns of Alberton and Superior and the community of St. Regis. Wastewater treatment in the rural area of the county is by individual septic tanks and drain fields. The following summary of public sewer systems in Mineral County provides basic descriptive information on the sewer collection and treatment systems currently in use in the towns of Alberton and Superior, and the community of St. Regis area.

Alberton

The Alberton wastewater treatment system provides service for approximately 200 connections. The existing wastewater collection system is comprised of a network of gravity sewer pipes with two lift stations. The gravity system includes pipe diameters ranging in size from 3 to 8 inches. The system was installed in 1968, with the majority of the system installed before 1972.

The Alberton wastewater system discharged directly into the Clark Fork River until 1968 when a lagoon treatment system was constructed. The wastewater treatment system was upgraded in 2000 to a 3 cell lagoon with aeration. The lagoon system was originally constructed in 1968-1970 as part of the major sewer construction project by the town. The aerated lagoon was part of a major upgrade that also included construction of a lift station. The treated effluent discharges to the Clark Fork River. Alberton recently received grant funding through the Treasure State Endowment Program and the Renewable Resource Grant and Loan Program for wastewater improvements.

Superior

The Town of Superior's wastewater system provides service for approximately 400 connections. The existing wastewater collection system is comprised of a network of gravity sewer pipes. The gravity system includes pipe diameters ranging in size from 6 to 10 inches. The system was installed from 1968 to 1997, with the majority of the system installed in 1968.

The wastewater treatment system uses a two cell aerated lagoon that was originally constructed in 1968. The lagoon was upgraded in 1999 to include a new geotextile liner. Sludge was removed and a new aeration was installed. A curtain was installed to create a quiescent zone in cell number two. A new aeration system and a disinfection system were added in 2005 to reduce coliform bacteria counts before final discharge to the Clark Fork River. Three original lift stations were replaced in 2005 and lift station number four was installed in 2001.

St. Regis Area

The St. Regis wastewater treatment system was constructed in 1996 and has a two cell aerated lagoon with spray application for final disposal. The St. Regis wastewater system is operated by Mineral County through the St. Regis Sewer District and provides service for approximately 115 connections. The existing wastewater collection system is comprised of a network of gravity sewer pipe throughout the business and residential districts. The gravity system includes pipe diameters ranging in size of 4-inch to 8-inch mains. A lift station collects effluent from gravity

mains and a duplex pumping system transfer effluent through six-inch force main to the lagoon system. The St. Regis system has a third cell constructed, but it is not in use at this time. Plans are being formulated to complete the expansion of the third cell to provide additional capacity. This is a high priority project to protect public health and safety and to provide for economic development.

Mineral County Rural Area

The Montana Subdivision and Platting Act requires review of proposed sewer and water systems prior to approval by the county for all new parcels less than 160 acres. The new systems must meet or exceed minimum standards of the State Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). DEQ is the administrator of the Sanitation in Subdivisions Act (MSIS) which governs sewer and water system requirements. DEQ reviews sanitation facilities for all tracts less than 20 acres and all proposals or improvements connected to public systems.

The long term trend for use of individual sewer and water systems will most likely remain as the predominant method of meeting sanitation system requirements in subdivisions outside of the urban areas. It is possible that a large development proposal will require the use of community water and/or sewer systems, but the timing and location of such a proposal is not readily apparent. Additional development in the future may also warrant consideration of a community sanitation or water system to address environmental concerns, but the need will likely not arise within the near future barring an unforeseen rapid growth scenario. The need for central systems should be assessed on a case by case basis during review of specific development proposals.

Transportation

Roads

The Mineral County road system includes Interstate 90, which provides a convenient direct connection from Mineral County to Idaho to the west and Missoula to the east. Although the interstate provides many benefits, it also brings impacts to local law enforcement and emergency responders. The other main transportation route in Mineral County is Montana Highway 135, which originates in St. Regis and continues along the Clark Fork River to Paradise, Montana in Sanders County.

Roads in Mineral County are maintained by the county, Towns of Alberton and Superior, Montana Department of Transportation (MDT), and the U.S. Forest Service. Mineral County and the Lolo and Ninemile Districts have a cooperative Schedule A maintenance agreement for interspersed road segments that results in a road maintenance exchange. The construction of Interstate 90 followed the route of Highway 10 and construction orphaned sections of what now is referred to as Old Highway 10. MDT maintains part of the Old Highway 10 road sections and Mineral County provides limited maintenance for the remaining sections.

The roads in the county network are divided into jurisdictional categories for maintenance and funding based on their functional classification as principal or minor arterials, major or minor collectors, and local roads. Interstate 90, a principal arterial, is a priority for funding improvements and maintenance programs and is on the National Highway System. Montana Highway 135 is a minor arterial. These major roads are maintained by MDT.

The county has a network of local roads that are under the jurisdiction of the Mineral County Road Department. Maintaining the roads is a formidable undertaking, and one that is of primary importance in the minds of local residents who are isolated from essential public services.

Maintenance is also provided by the county for roads within the unincorporated communities. The total mileage of county roads creates the very difficult task of maintaining or improving the roads to desirable standards with a limited budget.

Airport

Mineral County has one airport located approximately two miles east of Superior which parallels Interstate 90 and has a runway length of 3,700 feet. Mineral County has six hangars that are leased to the public. The airport had a major upgrade in 2005 that consisted of reconstructing and surfacing runways, tree removal for improved sight distance, and fencing to prevent animal encroachment. Air ambulance services are available from Missoula on an on call emergency basis with response estimated to be 15- 30 minutes from the request time. The Lolo National Forest operates a heliport at the St. Regis Work Center during the active fire seasons.

Public Transportation

Public transportation is offered in Mineral County by the Pioneer Council. The Pioneer Council bus operates Monday-Friday providing scheduled service from destinations in Mineral County to Missoula, Plains, Superior, and Kellogg, ID. All Mineral County residents are eligible to ride the bus, as space permits.

Rail

Montana Rail Link railroad enters at Alberton and travels along the Clark Fork River to the Sanders County line. The route length is approximately 60 miles. Montana Rail Link provides service to the former Diamond Match Mill site and the Tricon Timber Mill. Similar to Interstate 90, although the rail lines benefit the county, they also result in impacts to law enforcement and fire district resources.

Non-Motorized Transportation

Facilities for non-motorized transportation users (bicyclists, pedestrians, etc.) are limited to sidewalks in developed areas. Outside of developed areas non-motorized facilities are largely absent, with the exception of forest service roads and trails, which are more recreational in nature. Providing separated facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians is crucial not only to improve safety but also to provide mobility options for older adults and individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, the mere presence of sidewalks, bike lanes, and bike paths can encourage people to walk and bike as opposed to driving. Not only do these modes of transportation provide health benefits to users, but it also results in less wear and tear on county roads and town streets. Additionally, more and more people throughout Montana and the west are choosing to live in communities that are accommodating to walking and biking.

Moving forward Mineral County, Alberton and Superior intend to look at ways to develop, maintain, and expand sidewalks and bicycle facilities in developed communities. The Town of Superior is a good example of focusing on sidewalk replacement with its 50/50 cost sharing sidewalk replacement program, where the town splits the cost of sidewalk replacements with property owners.

In addition to sidewalks, Mineral County also plans to look for opportunities to construct off-street paved paths that connect communities throughout the county as part of its effort to attract new residents and visitors. One way to achieve this is to work cooperatively with MDT when they are planning improvements in Mineral County by approaching MDT about constructing a

separated path in or alongside the highway right-of-way to see whether or not it would be feasible in the future. Separated paths can provide substantial health and economic benefits to communities as cycle touring is a growing recreational activity throughout the country.

One local example of the popularity of cycling is the Hiawatha trail that follows old railroad beds. While the trail is primarily in Idaho, the east entry point is in Mineral County near Lookout Pass. The Hiawatha trail receives an estimated 35,000 annual users. The Lolo National Forest is currently in the process of developing a trail that will continue the Hiawatha trail into Montana. The new 35 mile trail, named the Route of the Olympian, will be developed on old railroad beds and connect the Hiawatha trail in the Taft area with St. Regis. Mineral County supports and intends to build on this effort.

Public Infrastructure Strategy

All municipalities and counties are faced with the need for capital improvements – repair or replacement of existing physical facilities, land acquisition and construction of new facilities such as community centers, parks and playgrounds, fire stations, and sewage treatment plants. Capital improvements planning is the preparation and updating of a proposed schedule of public works and related equipment to be built or purchased by a community during the foreseeable future. Capital improvements planning cannot guarantee all of the proposed projects will be undertaken, but it can go a long way toward guaranteeing the most effective use of limited resources.

Capital Improvements Planning

A Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) provides a vital link between a community's Growth Policy and the implementation of that plan. The CIP works in conjunction with the jurisdiction's annual operating budget and its long-range fiscal planning and is one of the most effective management tools available to the county. By preparing and following a CIP, local officials are in a better position to make objective and informed decisions as to how their community will provide for its citizens. CIPs can also be the basis for improving intergovernmental and regional relations, as a proposed project may involve several jurisdictions. These benefits, and others inherent in capital improvements planning, are not automatic but are dependent on the commitment of the community and the effectiveness of the local government administration.

The objective of the CIP is to match needed improvement projects with revenue and financing sources to ensure that public facilities will be repaired, expanded, or constructed as required by future growth, public health and safety, or other community needs. How, when, and where public facilities are provided greatly affects the pattern of future land development and the public cost of providing these facilities.

At a minimum, the CIP should contain:

- A list of needed capital improvement projects for several or all of the public facilities managed by the local government;
- Clear priorities for funding and constructing the improvement projects (the needs list is put in priority order);
- Potential and recommended funding sources to pay for each project; and
- A rough time schedule for each project.

Maintenance Strategy

The availability of public infrastructure is a primary factor in influencing directions in which a community grows. Accordingly, growth of the towns and communities will most likely occur in locations where public infrastructure is available. Moving forward Mineral County and the Towns of Alberton and Superior will provide and maintain infrastructure capacity to support growth within their respective communities. Mineral County will support the efforts of Alberton and Superior in providing and maintaining infrastructure to uphold public health and safety.

Natural Resources

Mineral County's landscape consists of a stark contrast of steep mountainous terrain and extended river valley lowlands. The Clark Fork River Valley generally extends from east to west along the Clark Fork River corridor with the St. Regis River corridor originating in the western portion of the county and running to the east to join the Clark Fork River near St. Regis. The Fish Creek drainage originates along the Montana – Idaho line and has an area of approximately 260 square miles. Other significant drainages in Mineral County include Trout Creek, Cedar Creek, Dry Creek, Little Joe, Two Mile, Ward Creek, Deer Creek and Big Creek originating on the Montana – Idaho border and terminating at the Clark Fork River or St. Regis River.

Climate

Mineral County lies in a heavily forested, mountainous region of the state and includes a diverse range of topography and climatic conditions characteristic of the northern Rocky Mountains. The climate of the area is semi-arid, with most of the precipitation coming in the form of snow in the upper elevations and rain during late spring and early summer at the eastern end of the county. Total precipitation averages from over 30 inches annually in the western part near Haugan to less than 16 inches at Superior and 20 inches around Alberton. Mineral County has an average annual snowfall of 37 inches at Superior, increasing to 113 inches at Haugan with even higher levels in upper elevations toward Lookout Pass. The variation in precipitation, and change in geology and landforms, has a dramatic effect on the vegetation, soils, water resources and wildlife indigenous to the region.

Soils

Mineral County soils in the low lying areas have significant variations that result from alluvial formations where soils are deposited, graded, and mixed by a series of water events and glacial actions. The soil morphology for the county is the result of several long term events over the course of geologic time. The soil formations visible today are directly related to the Glacial Lake Missoula phenomenon that caused water to rise and drain in successive events forming mixed silt, clay and gravel alluvial soils that occupy the main valley. The gravel or rocks in the alluvial soils are rounded and typically increase in size at greater depths. The steeper valleys that connect to the main Clark Fork valley have soils derived from erosion or decomposition of the bedrock from glacial events, and are typically composed of more angular materials.

Agricultural Soils

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) evaluates soils based on their capability to support agricultural production and classifies soils into four different categories:

Prime Farmland has the properties needed to produce sustained high-yield crops when managed with modern farming techniques.

Prime Farmland (if irrigated) soil has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, etc.

Farmland of Statewide Importance is high productivity land, with examples found in both the Lozeau-Quartz and the Tarkio areas.

Farmland of Local Importance does not quite meet the guidelines for Prime Farmland but is considered important because these soils economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. The cost of energizing surface water pumps along the Clark Fork River at the start of irrigation season is reportedly cost prohibitive for the financial return on the crop or pasture forage produced.

Figure 32 shows the distribution of agricultural soils across Mineral County.

Sand and Gravel Resources

Sand and gravel resources are generally, but not always, located along streams, rivers, or areas where certain kinds of geologic activities have occurred. Figure 33 shows potential sand and gravel resources and currently permitted open cut mines in Mineral County. This may help to identify where additional gravel resources have a greater potential of being found and developed. Sand and gravel are important construction materials which are intended to be utilized, particularly in areas where extraction and processing will not negatively impact nearby landowners.

Surface Water

Mineral County has abundant surface water from small tributaries to the Clark Fork River that has an average flow of 24,000 cubic feet per second. The smaller volume streams are important sources for the Clark Fork River in that most streams are in steeply wooded valleys that maintain a lower water temperature than the Clark Fork River.

The Clark Fork River provides a yearlong source of water for irrigation, livestock, and domestic needs. The use of surface water is diverse and includes agricultural, municipal, and recreational purposes. Agricultural uses of water are important to the county, although not an overriding concern as in more ideal agricultural areas across the state. As is the case in most counties in Western Montana, irrigation potential is limited by the mountainous topography. Also important is the use of surface water for recreational purposes. Many small mountain lakes in Mineral County provide ideal conditions to sustain an excellent fish and wildlife population and add to the recreational use of water in the county. The ponds, reservoirs, and streams in the county are ideal habitat for fish and waterfowl and draw many fishermen, hunters, and campers to the area each year. Good water quality is an important part of maintaining the citizens' of Mineral County's connection to their history and also an important part of their future. Efforts to protect water quality will be made when construction, maintenance and other projects are undertaken.

Groundwater

The Clark Fork River Valley has predominantly alluvial aquifers that derive water from the Clark Fork River. The alluvial water sources are augmented by recharge areas from the numerous canyons that connect to the river corridor. Alluvial aquifers have well depths from 50 to 200 feet in most locations. The bedrock aquifers have limited use with wells ranging from several hundred to more than eight hundred feet in depth.

Figure 32 - Agricultural Soils in Mineral County

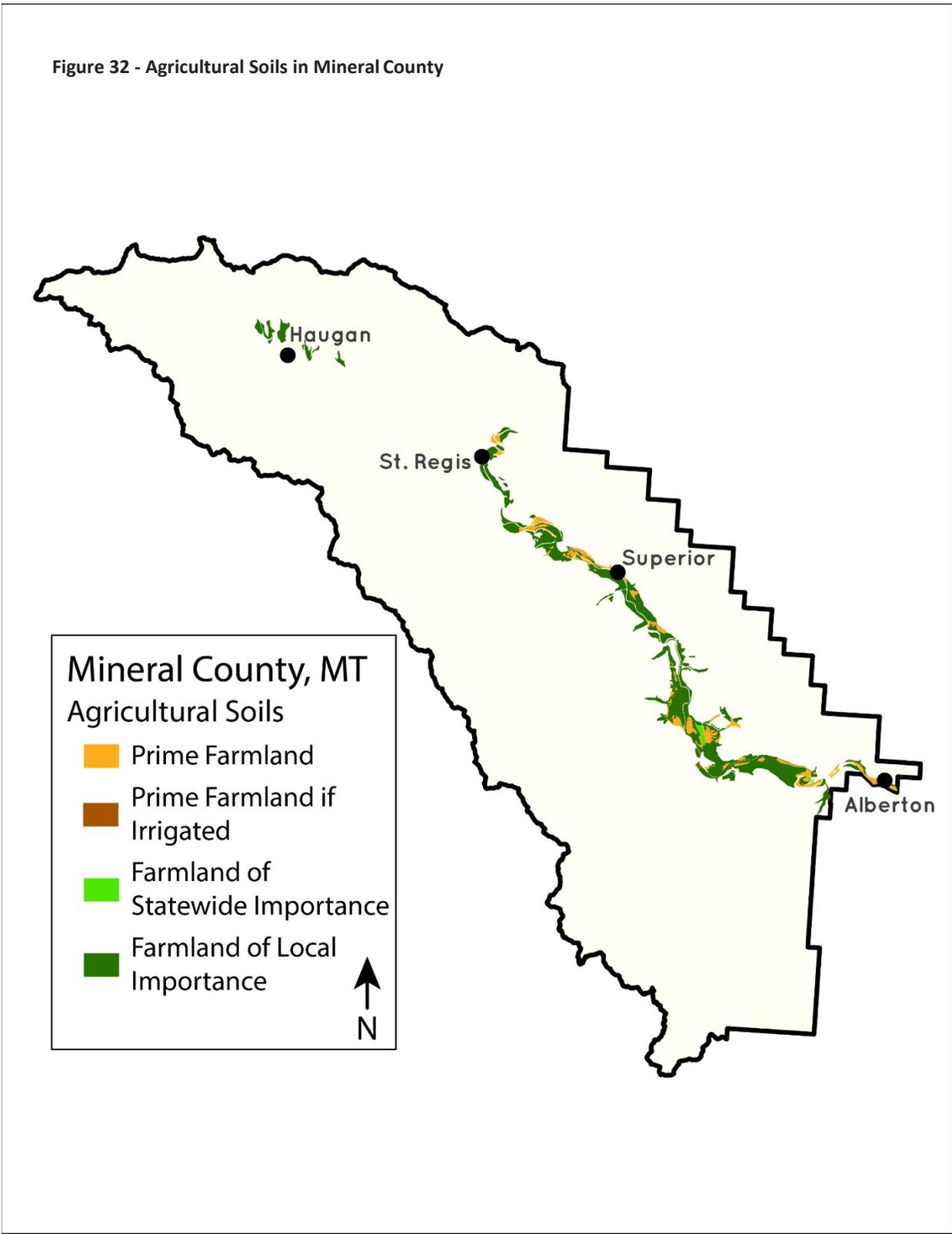
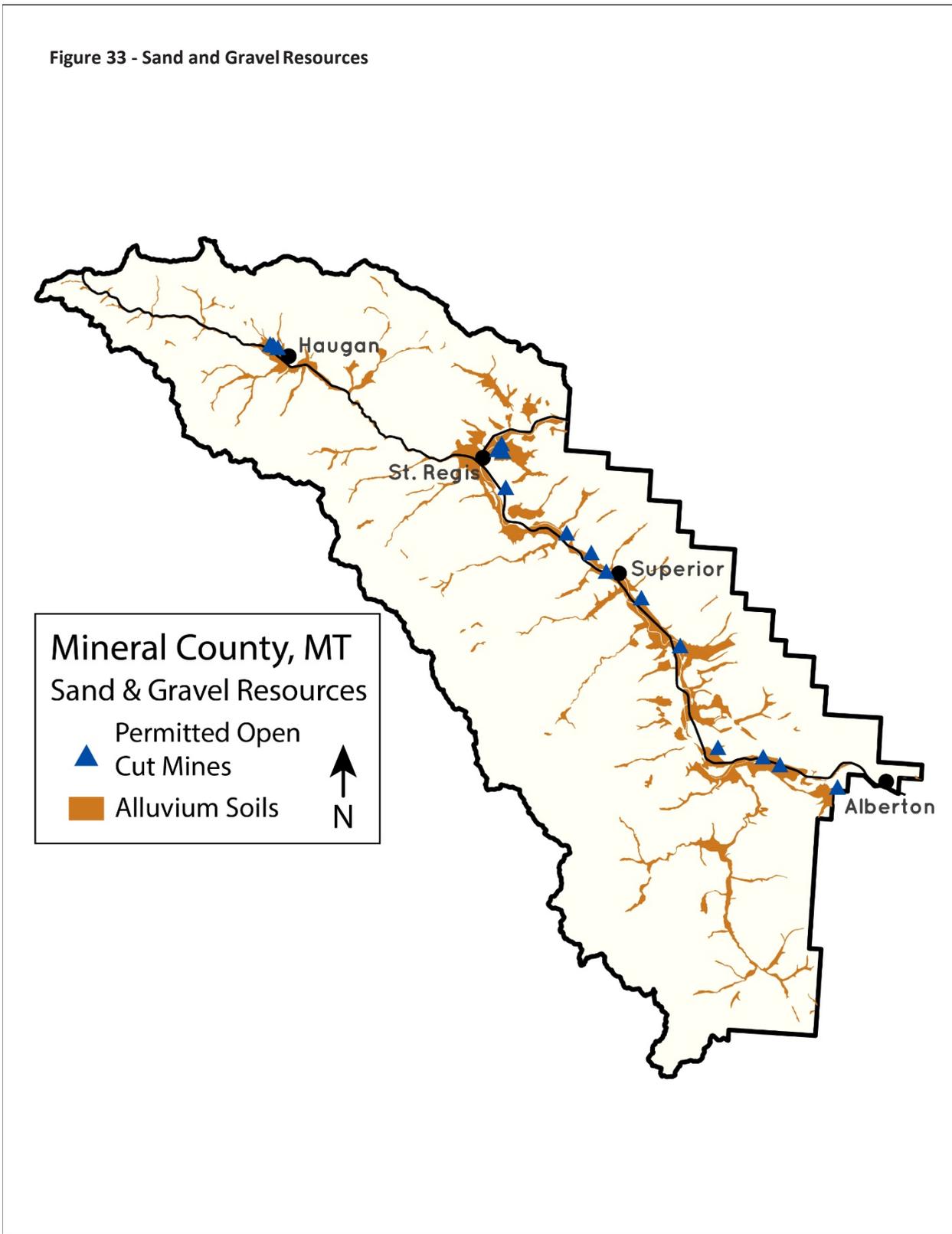


Figure 33 - Sand and Gravel Resources



The quantity of water from bedrock wells is variable, but generally produce lesser amounts than alluvial wells and are subject to seasonal recharge patterns when some wells go dry during late summer due to lack of recharge.

The municipal water supplies in the county are primarily dependent on groundwater for a potable domestic supply, although Alberton also utilizes treated surface water. Community systems in Alberton and Superior use community wells for their supply, and St. Regis area residents are using individual wells. Water supply for domestic use in the rural unincorporated communities is also obtained from individual wells.

Vegetation

Mineral County supports a wide variety of types of vegetation due to the diversity of landforms, climate and soils in the area. Only a small percentage of total land area has been developed for urban use and native timber species occupy a substantial portion of the county. The predominant plant species are the conifer trees that comprise the forested areas. The U.S Forest Service lands are managed for tree production and recreational pursuits. Historic fire events have resulted in extensive areas of post fire growth with trees including lodge pole pine and Douglas fir. Logging in the latter 1800s and early 1900s resulted in harvesting many of the old growth trees.

In the lower bench land areas, a variety of rangeland grasses and native shrubs are common. The rolling hills and fertile parts of the Clark Fork River valley have been converted to support agricultural uses in some areas. The grasses which dominate the lowlands are interspersed with large tracts of private ranch land and some irrigated cropland. Riparian areas at the lower elevations near streams and rivers support natural grasses, shrubs and stands of poplar and aspen. Other perennial grasses and shrubs, including sagebrush and rabbit brush are found in the area. There is also a variety of riparian and wetland ecosystems plant communities along the rivers and streams in the planning area. The riparian area includes cottonwood, willow, alder, wild roses sedges and forbs. These riparian and wetland ecosystems serve as aquifer recharge areas, help maintain water quality, and reduce the impacts of seasonal flooding. These areas provide important natural functions and should be protected when development occurs.

Wildlife

Mineral County contains a diverse cross section of landforms and vegetation types that are typical in the semiarid environment found in the rugged and rolling terrain of western Montana. The local geography includes riverside riparian areas, coulees, rugged forested mountains, and dry sloping hills providing habitat for a diverse wildlife population. The Montana Natural heritage Program has documented 46 species of concern, threatened, or endangered species in Mineral County. A list can be found at <http://mtnhp.org/SpeciesOfConcern?AorP=a>.

Mineral County has both high quality fishing and hunting resources. The quantity of federal land provides a vast landscape suitable for large animal habitat. Recreational areas for both hunting and fishing are considered one of the most important qualities of Mineral County for both residents and nonresidents. Access to public lands is an ever increasing concern as more limitations are enacted by governmental agencies and large private landholders. In some cases, the lands are being sold to individuals that completely restrict historical access.

Winter range for elk - the most critical habitat - is located on a significant part of the public land at lower elevation, and also includes lowland areas that are in private ownership. The development of

private land with high value winter range has developed into a major issue regarding subdivisions located in the urban interface area. Mapping of habitat for large game animal and nongame animal species is available from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks web site. Large animal travel corridors in the area of Interstate 90 have been identified and should be used for guidance when conducting scoping assessments and when considering land use alteration. In general, Mineral County seeks to maintain as much winter range and other high quality habitat as possible in order to support healthy game animal populations.

The rivers and streams of Mineral County provide an abundance of exceptional cold-water fisheries and recreational opportunities. The Clark Fork River, which bisects the county, is a renowned trout fishery and is a foundation for recreation and tourism. The river and its tributaries form a unique aquatic system that not only supports rainbow trout, brook trout and brown trout sport fisheries, but also strongholds for native westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. As these and other aquatic populations are wild and self-sustaining, they rely on intact habitat and connectivity between the river and its tributaries. Thus, protection and wise land use around surface waters is critical to the persistence of these resources. Mineral County's aquatic resources are unique and are largely supported by the large public land base that comprises most of the county.

Clark Fork River

The Clark Fork River is a centerpiece of Mineral County that supports a very popular wild rainbow trout, cutthroat trout and brown trout fishery. This large river supports >40,000 angler-days per year. The vitality of this fishery depends on sustained and improved quality of spawning and nursery habitats in tributaries, which provide clean water and trout recruitment to the river.

Tributary Streams

Mineral County also has an abundance of cold water tributary streams (>40 stream systems including the St. Regis River), that originate in the high mountains and provide many resource values and recreational opportunities as they make their way to the Clark Fork River. These free-stone streams generally lie on public lands and have excellent water quality, as well as outstanding trout fisheries. While providing recruitment to the Clark Fork River, most of these systems offer great opportunities for cutthroat trout and brook trout "creek" fishing. Stream protection, restoration and enhancement efforts continue to be a priority on many of these streams and promise to improve fishing and recreational opportunities in both the streams and the Clark Fork River.

Mountain Lakes

Mineral County is also home to more than 70 sub-alpine, "mountain" lakes (> 1 acre) that lie primarily along the Idaho state-line divide. These lakes support a diversity of fishing opportunities, scenery, and hiking destinations. Lakes include a mix of self-sustaining and stocked fisheries that support westslope cutthroat trout, brook trout and rainbow trout. Variable accessibility provides opportunities that range from direct road access to popular fisheries to back country hiking or horseback trips in relative solitude. Improving and further diversifying mountain lake fisheries is also a priority for resource managers.

Introduction

This chapter describes the coordination efforts between Mineral County and the towns of Alberton and Superior, as well as how the County coordinates with other governmental agencies. Compatible policies, coordinated services and regular communication between the County and other governments are necessary for effective governance to address issues of mutual interest, and to provide efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

Coordination between Mineral County and Alberton and Superior

The health and vitality of Mineral County, the Town of Alberton and the Town of Superior are interconnected. As such, the three local governments intend to support each other's projects and priorities in a united manner whenever possible.

Mineral County currently coordinates with the towns of Alberton and Superior on land use issues in the county. All three entities share subdivision regulations as well as this Growth Policy. Development proposals in Mineral County and the towns of Alberton and Superior are reviewed by the Mineral County Planning Board, which serves in the capacity of planning review for all jurisdictions. If a proposed subdivision lies within one mile of the Town of Alberton or Superior Mineral County submits the preliminary plat to the appropriate Town Council for review and comment. If a proposed subdivision lies partly within the Town of Alberton or Superior and Mineral County, the preliminary plat must be submitted to, and approved, conditionally approved, or denied by both the County Commissioners and the Town Council. When a proposed subdivision is also proposed to be annexed into the Town of Alberton or Superior, the appropriate Town Council will attempt to combine public hearings and otherwise coordinate the subdivision review process and annexation procedures with the County Commissioners.

Mineral County, Alberton, and Superior also coordinate on emergency operations, through their Emergency Operations Plan. The Emergency Operations Plan identifies roles and responsibilities relating to emergency events for Mineral County, Alberton, Superior, fire departments, the State of Montana, Montana Highway Patrol, Montana Department of Disaster and Emergency Services, and the federal government. Roles and responsibilities are identified in the following categories, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

Coordination with the U.S. Forest Service

With the Lolo National Forest covering the majority of Mineral County, actions and decisions on federal land directly impact local residents and communities. Mineral County has adopted a Resource Use Plan, which is official public policy, that addresses the county's expectations with regard to the management of public lands in Mineral County. Until recently there was minimal coordination between Mineral County and the Lolo National Forest regarding decisions on federal lands. To increase coordination with the Lolo National Forest, Mineral County intends to request cooperating agency status with the U.S Forest Service. Cooperating agency status would allow Mineral County to participate in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process which includes the preparation of Environmental Assessments or Environmental Impact Statements. The Council on Environmental Quality's regulations implementing NEPA define a cooperating agency as any agency that has jurisdiction by law or special expertise for proposals covered by NEPA. Cooperating agency status would be especially helpful for Mineral County as the Lolo National Forest is seeking to update their National Forest Plan in the near future.

Mineral County recognizes the harvest of sustainable yields of the federally managed forest lands have perceptibly declined for the Superior and Ninemile Ranger Districts since the 1986 Lolo Forest Plan was adopted. The Lolo Forest, particularly the Superior and Ninemile Ranger Districts, have the capability of increased forest product yields when factoring the sustainable yield potential. Mineral County seeks tangible solutions to maximize the use of the forest products in relation to sustainable yields and to insure that critical access to forested areas by the national road system is not further eroded but enhanced by best management strategies.

Wildland Urban Interface

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is the area where homes are built near or among lands prone to wildland fire. All of the Mineral County communities are located in or near the WUI so fire hazards pose a significant threat to life and property. Figure 34 shows a generalized WUI.

The Mineral County Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) seeks to reduce hazardous fuels in high-risk areas to limit the likelihood of damages to life and property in the event of a wildfire. The Mineral County Subdivision Regulations require that all subdivisions be planned, designed, constructed, and maintained so as to minimize the risk of fire and to permit the effective and efficient suppression of fires in order to protect persons, property, and forested areas. While the subdivision regulations do not specifically call out the WUI, they do require a fire prevention and control plan for areas identified as wildfire hazard areas by the Forest Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), a local fire protection authority, or this Growth Policy. For the purposes of subdivision application and review, all areas that are not located within an incorporated town, and those subdivisions within incorporated towns that abut wildland fuels, should include a fire prevention and control plan unless the local fire protection authority submits comments indicating it is not necessary.

The WUI standards from the National Fire Protection Association, DNRC and the Forest Service should be used as a reference to revise and update the Mineral County CWPP. The approximately 365 private parcels of land with structures that adjoin Forest Service lands result in 143 miles of common boundary. The 172 private parcels with structures that adjoins state DNRC and Fish, Wildlife and parks lands also results in 56 miles of common boundary.

Fuels reduction is an important component of fire management. Mineral County intends to pursue fuels reduction efforts in concert with local, state and federal agencies and private landowners in order to minimize threats to health, safety and property.

Developing practical standards, methods and funding sources that address WUI fuels reduction for private, state and federal lands is a high priority. When undertaking fuels reduction efforts, those properties adjoining Forest Service lands should be given priority. One project that stands out as a priority is the above the Town of Alberton to protect the water supply.

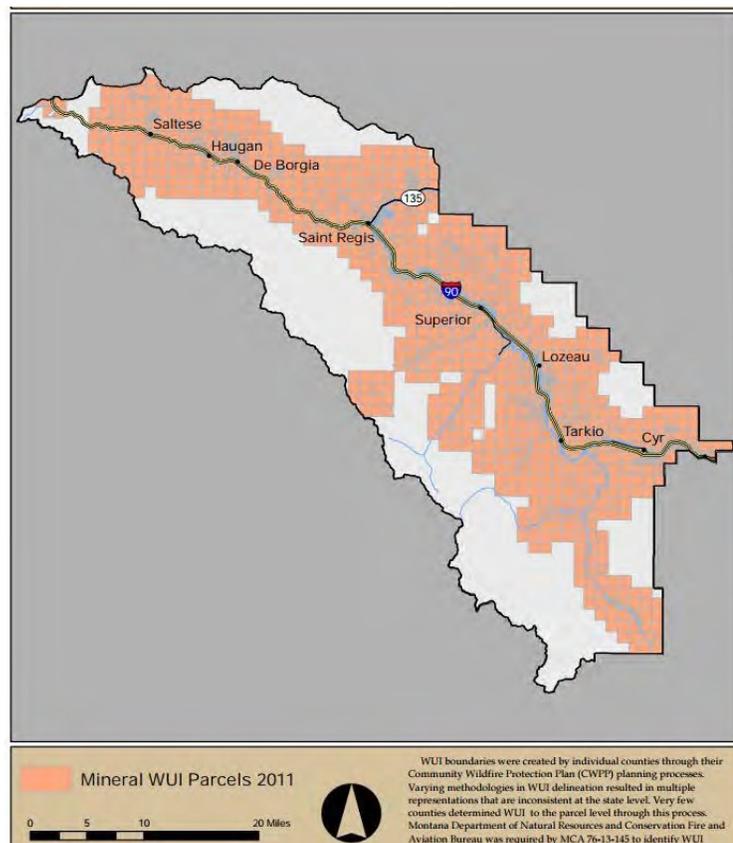


Figure 34 – Mineral County Wildland Urban Interface

Introduction

Montana’s Subdivision and Platting Act requires that decisions regarding proposed subdivisions be made with respect to several criteria including compliance with state subdivision law, local subdivision regulations, the Growth Policy, and local zoning. More specifically, all subdivisions in Montana must be reviewed under the primary subdivision review criteria defined in MCA 76-3-608(3)(a), which include a proposed subdivisions impact on “agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, the natural environment, wildlife, wildlife habitat, and public health and safety.” The intent of this chapter is to address how the Mineral County Board of County Commissioners will define the primary review criteria and evaluate and make decisions on proposed subdivisions in Mineral County using these criteria.

Subdivision Primary Review Criteria

Under Montana state law growth policies are required to explain how governing bodies will define the primary subdivision review criteria and evaluate and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions with respect to these criteria. The following are Mineral County’s definitions of those criteria, how they are evaluated and how decisions are made with respect to those criteria during subdivision review.

Agriculture

All aspects of farming or ranching including the cultivation or tilling of soil; dairying; the production, cultivation, growing or harvesting of agricultural or horticultural commodities; raising of livestock, bees, fur-bearing animals or poultry; and any practices including forestry or lumbering operations, including preparation for market or delivery to storage, to market, or to carriers for transportation to market. In reviewing a proposed subdivision’s impact on agriculture the following items should be considered.

- Whether the proposed subdivision permanently removes the following soils from agricultural production - prime, prime if irrigated, soils of local importance, or soils of statewide importance.
- Whether the proposed subdivision includes measures to control the spread of noxious weeds
- Impacts on adjacent and community-wide agricultural operations
- Historic and current agricultural activity.

Agricultural Water User Facilities

Those facilities which provide water for irrigation or stock watering to agricultural lands for the production of agricultural products. These facilities include, but are not limited to, ditches, headgates, pipes, and other water conveying facilities. In reviewing a proposed subdivision’s impact on agricultural water user facilities the following items should be considered.

- Access for maintenance, including legal (easements) and physical access.
- Runoff
- Changes to water quantity and/or quality
- Water rights

Natural environment

The physical conditions which exist within a given area, including land, air, water, mineral, flora, fauna, sound, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. In reviewing a proposed subdivision's impact on the natural environment the following items should be considered.

- Impact on and relation to riparian and/or wetland environments
- Vegetation
- Noxious weeds
- Air quality
- Natural landscapes and open spaces

Wildlife

Living animals which are neither human nor domesticated. The term does not include feral animals. In reviewing a proposed subdivision's impact on wildlife the following items should be considered.

- The potential for conflict between wildlife and humans and their pets

Wildlife habitat

A place or area frequented by wildlife or site where wildlife naturally live or travel through. In reviewing a proposed subdivision's impact on wildlife the following items should be considered.

- Impacts on water quality and/or quantity for aquatic species
- Encroachment on migration routes
- Locations of nesting or den sites
- Loss of habitat, winter range or vegetative cover

Public health and safety

The prevailing healthful, sanitary condition of well-being for the community at large. Conditions that relate to public health and safety include but are not limited to: disease control and prevention; emergency services; environmental health; flooding, fire or wildfire hazards, rock falls or landslides, unstable soils, steep slopes, and other natural hazards; high voltage lines or high pressure gas lines; and air or vehicular traffic safety hazards. In reviewing a proposed subdivision's impact on public health and safety the following items should be considered.

- Emergency vehicle access
- Proximity to natural and man-made hazards
- Open space
- Potential for wildland fire
- High groundwater
- Air quality
- Water quality
- Proximity to hazardous materials
- Proximity to high voltage power lines

- Proximity to high pressure gas lines

Local Services

Any and all services that local governments or public or private utilities are authorized to provide for the benefit of their citizens. In reviewing a proposed subdivision's impact on local services the following items should be considered.

- Impact on current levels of service
- Level of increased demand on local services
- Cost of providing additional local services to proposed subdivision

Public Hearings

This section describes how public hearings will be conducted for the review of subdivision proposals when a public hearing is required. Public hearings are required for major subdivisions. The process for public hearings shall be conducted as follows:

1. Notice of the public hearing will be published in a newspaper and sent by certified mail at least 15 days prior to a public hearing per MCA 73-3-605.
2. A quorum is required for official action. When a quorum is not present, no action item will be taken and the hearing will be rescheduled to the next available meeting date for which public notice requirements can be met.
3. At the hearing a staff member will give a summary of the staff report pointing out key issues, findings and recommendations, followed by board members being given the opportunity to ask questions of staff.
4. The subdivider and her/his representative will be given the opportunity to provide a summary of the subdivision proposal and address the key issues, findings and recommendations.
5. The presiding officer will ask for public comments from proponents, opponents and others, followed by the subdivider being given the opportunity for rebuttal. In the interest of time, the presiding officer may limit the amount of time members of the public are given to speak so long as everyone desiring to speak has a reasonable opportunity.
6. The presiding officer will close the public hearing for board deliberation. During this time board members may ask questions of the subdivider, staff and any members of the public. Due to late hour or other extraordinary circumstances, a public hearing may be closed and continued to a later date.
7. The board will deliberate and make a recommendation (Planning Board) or decision (Board of County Commissioners) on the application.
8. Prior to voting on the subdivision application, board members will review the subject matter contained in the public comments and discuss whether and how the comments impacted their decisions.
9. Planning Board recommendations and Commissioner decisions will be supported by written findings of fact and conclusions of law.

Introduction

The effectiveness of a Growth Policy relies on its ability to be implemented. With that in mind, the strategy below provides goals, objectives and actions intended to address the issues discussed in this document.

Goals: Broad Statements describing a desired future condition.

Objectives: General description of the steps needed to be taken to meet the goal.

Actions: Specific steps needed to be taken to obtain the objectives.

Economy

Goal#1 Encourage Economic Development Opportunities in Mineral County and the towns of Alberton and Superior

Objectives

1. Retain existing businesses in Mineral County

Actions

- a) Organize a regular roundtable where business owners and community leaders can discuss challenges, needs, and opportunities for retaining existing businesses and attracting new ones.
- b) Support efforts of existing businesses to expand operations in Mineral County through low-interest loans, grant writing and administration, and other measures.
- c) Develop and promote a buy-local program to support local businesses.

2. Support new and prospective businesses in Mineral County

Actions

- a) Work with local and regional economic development organizations to provide technical assistance for entrepreneurs in Mineral County.
- b) Establish a mentoring program where experienced business owners provide assistance to new business owners and entrepreneurs.
- c) Disseminate information to entrepreneurs on state and federal economic development assistance and funding available for new businesses.
- d) Work with local schools to incorporate entrepreneurial education in the K-12 curriculum.
- e) Create and maintain an inventory of vacant lands and buildings available for commercial and industrial enterprises.
- f) Encourage the development of office spaces that accommodate teleworkers and/ or co-working spaces.

3. Provide resources for current and prospective employees to find living wage jobs in Mineral County

Actions

- a) Work with local and regional employers to identify workforce training needs.
- b) Work with local and regional economic development organizations to provide workforce training opportunities.

Goal #2 Capitalize on Mineral County's Natural Assets

Objectives

1. Support the tourism economy in Mineral County

Actions

- a) Develop and implement area-specific plans for improving signage, architecture, landscaping, lighting and the appearance and function of commercial areas along the Interstate 90 corridor.
- b) Continue and complete the Highway 135 St. Regis area improvement project to plan, fund and install pedestrian path, road crossing, speed limit safety improvement from the four-way intersection to Old Mill Loop Road.
- c) Brand Mineral County as a recreational destination by working with the state Office of Tourism, local guides, outfitters and other business owners to create and market vacation packages.
- d) Market Mineral County's recreational assets in nearby population centers – e.g. Spokane, Coeur d' Alene, Missoula, etc.
- e) Develop an official trail system for winter and summer use.
- f) Support development of expanded parking for recreational sites.

2. Encourage development of recreational opportunities

Actions

- a) Maintain existing river access and continue to facilitate other recreational sites along the Clark Fork and St. Regis Rivers.
- b) Support efforts to develop Route of the Olympian trail and the expansion of Lookout Pass Ski Area.
- c) Work to develop and expand snowmobile, ATV, biking, hiking and other opportunities.
- d) Develop and promote annual events such as races, poker runs and rallies.
- e) Work with the private sector to provide camping, eating and other services.
- f) Work to clarify the inventoried roadless areas and potentially reduce the designation of 1/3 of the county to a more realistic area that would provide local benefits. The inventoried roadless area for the Lolo National Forest should correspond to the Idaho National Forest designations.
- g) Support efforts of the Search and Rescue to expand resources as needed.

Goal #3 Maintain and Grow Mineral County's Economic Base

Objectives

1. Support the timber and agricultural industries

Actions

- a) Encourage the Forest Service and State of Montana to increase logging output.
- b) Support continued development of new technologies related to processing of biomass.
- c) Expand and support opportunities for value-added forest products and agriculture based business.
- d) Support efforts to expand markets for Mineral County wood and agricultural products.
- e) Conserve important soils for agricultural use and production.

Land Use

Goal #4 Promote Efficient Development Patterns in Established Communities.

Objectives

1. Establish land use patterns which accommodate growth, preserve the identity and character of existing communities, and minimize conflicts with existing land uses.

Actions

- a) Encourage development within and adjacent to existing communities in order to take advantage of existing infrastructure and services.
- b) Adopt zoning regulations in Superior and St. Regis to guide development with locally specific character.
- c) Update subdivision regulations as needed to keep up with legislative changes.
- d) Identify and promote practical areas for development and annexation around Alberton, Superior and St. Regis.

Goal #5 Provide for Orderly Development of Rural Areas that Minimizes Impact to Adjacent Lands

Objectives

1. Ensure new development is compatible with existing development and require appropriate mitigation when conflicts can be expected.

Actions

- a) Require appropriate measures (fencing, buffers, etc.) to mitigate impacts of new development.
- b) Require development to provide adequate water, drainage and sanitary and transportation facilities (including right-of-ways).
- c) Require adequate storm water facilities be designed, installed, and maintained.

2. Reduce risks to development associated with natural hazards

Actions

- a) Limit and discourage development of lands having severe physical limitations, including slope, soils, floodplains, etc. if limitations cannot be overcome with special engineering designs.
- b) Facilitate a floodplain study to digitize current 100-year floodplain panels and include approximate zone A areas using a county-led Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) process.
- c) Map Mineral County's wildland-urban interface.
- d) Work with the Lolo National Forest, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, private foresters and landowners to implement fuels reduction and defensible space programs on public and private lands in the wildland-urban interface.
- e) Update floodplain maps where needed.
- f) Incorporate the floodplain study for the Town of Superior into the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Plan.

Housing

Goal #6 Improve Housing Conditions in Mineral County

Objectives

1. Work with homeowners and landlords to improve single and multi-family housing

Actions

- a) In cooperation with property owners, apply for USDA grants providing assistance for low and moderate income households for repairs and improvements.
- b) Provide incentives for property owners to rehab housing in substandard condition.

Goal #7 Provide a range of housing options for Mineral County Residents

Objectives

1. Encourage development of affordable housing, senior housing, workforce housing and multi-family housing.

Actions

- a) Work with the private sector to develop market rate housing in and around existing communities.
- b) Provide incentives to developers for building affordable, senior and multi-family housing in and around existing communities.
- c) Work with housing agencies and lenders on applying for grants that provide assistance with down payments, closing costs and rehabilitation of older homes.
- d) Encourage the use of currently vacant properties as rentals to increase the available supply.

Infrastructure

Goal #8 Ensure Mineral County Communities Have Public Infrastructure in Place to Support Existing and Future Residents and Businesses

Objectives

1. **Maintain public infrastructure to support existing development and support public health and safety**

Actions

- a) Create and annually update capital improvements plans for each jurisdiction.
 - b) Complete water and wastewater improvements projects in the Town of Alberton, such as water storage tank repairs, distribution system layout, leak detection, fire protection, metering and addressing potential growth needs.
 - c) Ensure public infrastructure in Alberton, Superior and St. Regis provides for existing and planned development.
 - d) Support efforts of public safety and medical providers to protect lives and property and serve the community.
2. **Expand public infrastructure to accommodate growth**

Actions

- a) Work with unincorporated communities and the private sector to expand and/or develop public infrastructure to meet current and future residential and commercial demand.
3. **Develop and expand public infrastructure to support economic development**

Actions

- a) Develop access to 3-phase power both at the airport and to businesses in the Superior area.
- b) Develop an industrial park at the Superior airport.
- c) Support expansion of broadband internet service throughout Mineral County
- d) Support Mineral County Airport Expansion.
- e) Research and develop plans for a community event center at the Mineral County Fairgrounds to enhance and increase the displays, concessions, events such as shooting sports, and large gatherings and provide a year round center.
- f) Conduct a feasibility study for replacement of the fair grandstands in regard to structural design, construction costs and funding.

Goal #9 Ensure Mineral County's Transportation System is Safe and Accessible for All Users

Objectives

1. **Maintain existing transportation infrastructure**

Actions

- a) Establish a sidewalk improvements program in the Town of Alberton and the community of St. Regis, similar to what exists in Superior.
- b) Ensure all county roads and town streets meet or exceed minimum standards adopted by the responsible jurisdiction.
- c) Create street maintenance districts to repair and upgrade roads and streets.
- d) Verify right-of-ways and easements for roads under Mineral County jurisdiction.
- e) Develop a funding mechanism for resurfacing gravel roads in Alberton to provide long term dust abatement.

2. Expand non-motorized transportation options

Actions

- a) Create a planned network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities connecting Mineral County communities.
- b) Construct a trail system on the north side of the Clark Fork River near Superior to connect with the Fish, Wildlife and Parks fishing access site.
- c) Follow through with the planning for a bicycle route for the length of Mineral County that identifies areas with safety concerns and has adequate signage to identify and promote the route.
- d) Develop a bike/pedestrian path from Alberton to Petty Creek.

3. Improve motorized and traffic facilities

Actions

- a) Develop a work plan to replace the existing 48-inch single culvert with two 48-inch culverts that will carry a potential 100-year floodplain event on Flat Creek within the Superior town limits that lies under MDT and Superior rights-of-way.
- b) Continue to participate in the MDT Highway-Rail Safety Program to upgrade existing public railroad crossings with warning lights and cross arms.
- c) To address jurisdictional concerns, coordinate between the Town of Superior, Mineral County and MDT to resurface the Southside Road segment from the intersection with I-90 to Tami Drive.

Coordination

Goal #10 Improve Coordination Between Mineral County and Local, State and Federal Agencies

Objectives

Proactively engage with state and federal land management agencies on land use planning and decision making. Mineral County desires to establish a culture of cooperation, collaboration, and partnership in its land use planning process by promulgating policies and regulations that foster a consistent role for cooperating agencies. We believe that by working closely we improve communication and understanding, and identify common goals and objectives to enhance the management of both private and public lands.

Actions

- a) Request coordination and cooperating agency status with the U.S. Forest Service to be an integral participant in the 2016 Lolo Forest Plan update and work to enhance, grow and protect values and interests of the residents that live, work, support and depend on and recreate in Mineral County.
- b) Work cooperatively with the Lolo National Forest on maintaining access on forest roads and be a participant in the decision making process to potentially decommission roads.
- c) Work with Federal and State agencies in developing long-term plans which promote the economic benefits derived from publicly owned lands, while protecting the resources on these lands.
- d) Work with the Forest Service to address the critical loss of long term employees through the timely rehiring of those positions and by minimizing the combining, sharing or reassigning of the positions.
- e) Work with the Forest Service to insure the current road system is open and accessible for meeting the critical mission of Forest Service management, removal of sustainable yield, provide access in emergency situations and allow critical recreational access to all members of the public.

Environment

Goal #11 Protect Natural Resources, Clean Air and Water, and Wildlife Habitat

Objectives

1. Conserve high quality natural resources for present and future generations

Actions

- a) Protect riparian areas adjacent to surface waters by designating buffers that are appropriate for the site under consideration and requiring 310 permits.
- b) Promote the wise use and development of surface and groundwater rights so that the needs of water users are balanced with instream flows in public waters.
- c) Discourage development of important wildlife habitat, including federal and state.
- d) Support the restoration and protection of wild fisheries and the habitats that sustain them.

Community Development

Goal #12 Encourage a Culture of Community

Objectives

1. Promote civic engagement among residents of Mineral County

Actions

- a) Work with the school districts, area agencies on aging and other groups to provide

opportunities for volunteerism.

- b) Sponsor regular community clean up and service events such as the Town of Superior annual spring clean-up day.
- c) Facilitate the removal of unoccupied trailer units through the Mineral County Junk Vehicle Program.
- d) Research and identify potential locations for and promote youth activity centers in Alberton, Superior and St. Regis.

Review and Amendment

Montana Code Annotated 76-1-601(3)(f) requires growth policies to have an implementation strategy that includes a list of conditions that will lead to a revision of the Growth Policy. In addition to the conditions listed below, Mineral County and the towns of Alberton and Superior will review this Growth Policy at least once every five years to ensure the goals and objectives are still relevant and implementation is going according to schedule. Ideally, a review should occur on an annual basis in order to set work plans for the year and to gauge progress. Updates to the Growth Policy are expected based on the findings of these periodic reviews. Other conditions that will lead to review and revision are:

- Significant changes in economic, demographic, land use or other conditions.
- Rapid growth or decline in population.
- A change in Growth Policy law.

(Endnotes)

- 1 American Community Survey
- 2 ibid
- 3 ibid
- 4 American Community Survey
- 5 American Community Survey
- 6 Montana Department of Labor and Industry
- 7 Personal Interview
- 8 U.S. Census County Business Patterns
- 9 <http://www.bber.umt.edu/pubs/forest/Outlook/forestproducts2015.pdf>
- 10 Personal Interview
- 11 http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Montana/cp30061.pdf
- 12 Ibid