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In appreciation for their contribution to the current version
Of the Stillwater County Growth Policy:

Stillwater County Commissioners
Dennis Shupak, Chairman
Mark Crago
Maureen Davey

Stillwater County Planning Board
Gary Enstrom, President
Bob Van Oosten, Vice President
Gerald Edwards
Andrew Forcier
Carolyn Hutson
Curtis Jacobs
Dana Proctor
Brenda Studiner

Stillwater County Planning Staff
April Limburg

Planning Consultant
CTA Group
Forrest Mandeville Consulting

CHAPTER 3: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1. Early History

The county's earliest residents were Crow Indians. Southern Stillwater County was part of the Crow Indian Reservation from 1851 to 1892. Crow Agency was formerly located less than two miles south of the present town site of Absarokee. The first recorded appearance of white explorers was in 1806 when Captain Clark, of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, separated from his party in Three Forks and traveled east down the Yellowstone River. Trappers and traders, such as Manuel Lisa, Jim Bridger and Isborne Russell also traveled through this area in the 1800's. With the beginning of trading in the area, famous trails such as the Bridger and Bozeman Trails and Bozeman - Miles City Stagecoach Road crossed through the county.

Stillwater County has a rich mining history. There has been exploration and mining activity in its southern portion of the county since 1870. Most of the mining centered around the upper Stillwater Valley, above Nye, in a highly mineralized area, 28 miles long and 3 miles wide, named the Stillwater Complex. Nye City was built in the 1880's as the base for a gold mining operation in the area. During this decade the town boomed to a population of 500, but by 1890, Nye City was virtually a ghost town.

By 1883, the Northern Pacific had extended their railroad line along the lower Yellowstone Valley. As the railroads were constructed, access became easier. The railroad companies, to increase their business, actively promoted settling in the west along its lines where land was available. The railroads had received 40 alternate sections of public land for each mile of road built within the territories, thus they could raise capital by promoting settlement and selling land. Settlers from the east came by the thousands to farm what they were told was land with unlimited fertility. In 1918, the Northern Pacific built a railroad spur through the northern part of the county into the Lake Basin, terminating and creating the town of Rapelje.

3.2. Homesteading

Prior to the 1890's, some cattle grazing occurred in this area. With the passage of the Homestead Act, the prospect of free land and independence added a great incentive for people to settle lands in the west. It was possible to acquire 160 acres by living on the land and working it for five years. Most of the valleys and irrigated lands were thus settled. People homesteaded in the Stillwater County area between 1892 and 1913. The passage of the Carey Land Act in 1902 made it possible for individuals to obtain 320 acres by living on it seven months each year for three years. This act spurred additional people from the east to settle in the west. Many were the honyonkers, or dryland farmers. Between 1900 and 1920 over 1300 farms, mostly dryland, comprising nearly 670,000 acres were established in Stillwater County.

3.3 Irrigation Ditches

Numerous large irrigation projects were also started in the region at the same time railroad access and homestead land became available. The Big Ditch, Butcher Creek and Rosebud Ditch, Yellowstone Ditch, Flaherety Ditch, Garrigus Ditch, Gilbert and Tunnel Ditch, Italian Ditch, Mendenhall Ditch, Merrill Ditch, Old Mill Ditch, Phelps Ditch, Reed Point Ditch, and Shane Ditch were all constructed between 1882 and 1898. The Columbus Irrigation Project, Cove Ditch, and Kem-Mulherin Ditch were developed later between 1906 and 1914.

3.4. Stillwater County formed in 1913

Stillwater County was formed from parts of Yellowstone, Carbon and Sweet Grass Counties, by petition and election in 1913. The name of the county was taken from the Stillwater River. It was organized with the Town of Columbus as the county seat. The county boundaries were later changed in 1915 when 84 square miles in the northeastern part were added to Sweet Grass and four townships in southeastern Sweet Grass County were given to Stillwater County. Town sites were platted as people moved into this area. Park City was platted in 1884 and Columbus (formerly Stillwater) in 1891 for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Absarokee was originally platted in 1905 and Reed Point was platted in 1911. Fishtail was platted in 1913; Molt, Rapelje and Springtime were all platted in 1917; Nora was platted in 1918 and later expanded with the Wheat Basin plat in 1919. Beehive, Dean and Nye are better described as a composite of various surveys rather than platted town sites. There were 22 post-offices in the history of the county, but only eight are active post-offices today.

A sandstone quarry operated north of Columbus between 1890 and 1910. During its peak period, the quarry employed 72 miners and masons. Many local buildings are constructed of the course-grained sandstone as well as a wing of the State Capitol Building in Helena, the federal buildings in Butte and Helena, the original federal building in Billings, hotels in Forsyth and Havre, the Missoula and Havre high schools, and the Masonic Temple in Missoula. The quarry craftsman also supplied elaborate cemetery monuments and headstones to 40 Montana cemeteries including Columbus cemetery. Since 1910, there has been no further activity at the quarry, although the Petosa Monument Co. worked sandstone pieces for 30 years after the quarry closed.

3.5. Depression Era

The great depression began to affect this area in 1919, as several years of drought occurred, devastating crops and bankrupting many farmers. Many gave up and left the area, while their land was bought by larger landowners. The population in the northern part of the county declined and is only a fraction of what it had been in the homesteading years. The rate of decline in population slowed down by 1940. After the drought, farmers

and ranchers began to diversify. In addition to grazing cattle, they raised wheat, hay, oats, barley and sugar beets.

3.6. Mineral Development

Interest in the Stillwater Complex began in earnest around 1917 in response to the demand for chrome during World War I. Production did not start until 1941 and was terminated by 1943. The Anaconda Company, as agent for the Defense Plant Corporation of the Federal government began production of ore at the Benbow, Mountain View, and Gish properties. A mining town was built at Lake Camp above Horseman Flat to house miners. Production from the mine declined when the war ended and chrome was no longer economical to mine. The new mining town was later abandoned. Another war-induced shortage of chrome during the early 1950's resulted in the reopening of the Mouat Mine. In 1952 American Chrome Company contracted with the Federal government to stockpile chromite at Nye. Over 900,000 tons of concentrate, averaging 38.5 percent Cr_2O_3, was mined from the Mouat mine between 1953 and 1961. Chrome production ended in 1961 and a stockpile of ore was left near the mine. The most recent exploration activity in the Stillwater Complex began in the 1967 for platinum and associated metal potential. Platinum and palladium mineralization was first discovered by Johns Manville Corporation in the early 1970s. The rising price of platinum group metals resulted in development of the Stillwater Mine in 1985. Sibanye-Stillwater is currently operating the only platinum/palladium mine in the United States.

3.7. Schools and Special districts

Development efforts have continued around the county with the formation of school, fire, sewer, solid waste, light districts, cemetery districts and other community facilities/services since 1893. There are eight elementary school districts in the county serving Absarokee, Columbus, Fishtail, Molt, Nye, Rapelje, Reed Point and Park City. There are also five high school districts serving Absarokee, Columbus, Rapelje, Reed Point and Park City and a portion of the Broadview High School district in Stillwater County. Sewer Systems were built in Absarokee in 1950, Park City in 1968 and Reed Point in 1995. Private water user associations serve Absarokee since 1953 and Rapelje since 1962. Absarokee Fire District was formed in 1954, Park City Fire District in 1956, Broadview Fire District in 1967 and the Columbus Rural Fire District in 1990, Rapelje, Molt, Nye and Reed Point also have volunteer fire departments. Street light districts were created for Reed Point in 1919, Park City in 1953 and Absarokee in 1960. Cemetery districts were created for Park City in 1951, Rapelje in 1956 and the Rosebud Cemetery District for Absarokee in 1956. The County Solid Waste District was formed in 1975 and later revised collection and disposal methods in 1994 to comply with changing federal and state laws.

3.8 Development of Transportation System

The transportation system in the county began as overland trails and has been developed over time into the present road system. The Stillwater Road was initially developed in 1893, and then rebuilt in 1915 and 1935 from Columbus to Absarokee. Reconstruction began on the section through Fishtail to Nye in 1994. U. S. Highway 10 replaced the Bozeman - Miles City Stagecoach Road and was rebuilt in 1931. Interstate 90 was constructed through the county during 1968 to 1971 time period. Most of the existing county roads were petitioned, surveyed and declared public roads between from 1882 and 1920.

3.9. Utilities

Electrical and telephone service was established in the county in the early 1900's and a gas distribution system was constructed in the 1930's. Construction of the Mystic Lake dam and power plant was completed in 1925. Cable television lines were installed in the early 1970's and fiber optic cables were installed in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

3.10. Planning

A city-county planning board was formed in 1967 and a county planning board was formed in 1995. A comprehensive area plan was adopted in 1970, a Hard Rock Mining Impact Plan was approved in 1985 and amended in 1988, an Overall Economic Development Plan was adopted in 1989 and amended in 2012, and a Road and Bridge Plan was prepared in 1990. Subdivision activity in the county was extensive in the 1970's through the early 2000s, but has slowed since 2008. Subdivision regulations were initially adopted in 1970 and have been amended regularly to reflect changes in law. Flood plain maps and regulations were prepared in 1975 and revised in 1984. Maps were digitized in the 2010s as part of a FEMA project to remap floodplain along the Yellowstone River. One citizen petitioned planning and zoning district was established in 1979 for an area in the West Fork of the Stillwater drainage.

3.11. Summary

The history of mining, ranching, farming, development of town sites with community facilities and services, and more recently recreational development in the county are evident in the 2010's. This diversity provides the socio-economic base of Stillwater County and will likely continue to influence the culture of the area for years to come.

CHAPTER 4: EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS & FEATURES

4.1 LAND USES

There is a diversity of land ownership and use in Stillwater County. Approximately 79% of land in the County is in private ownership and the remaining 21% is publicly owned. Federal lands include 17% of the land area within the county and state owned lands account for another 4%. Other land uses include tract land, commercial tracts, town sites, exempt properties and other unclassified lands. The land ownership map (next page) shows the location of general ownership and conservation easements.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Irrigated lands are primarily located in the Fishtail Creek, Rosebud Creek, Stillwater and Yellowstone River valleys. Non-irrigated agricultural land is mostly located in northern Stillwater County. Grazing land is located throughout the county.

PRIVATE TIMBERLANDS

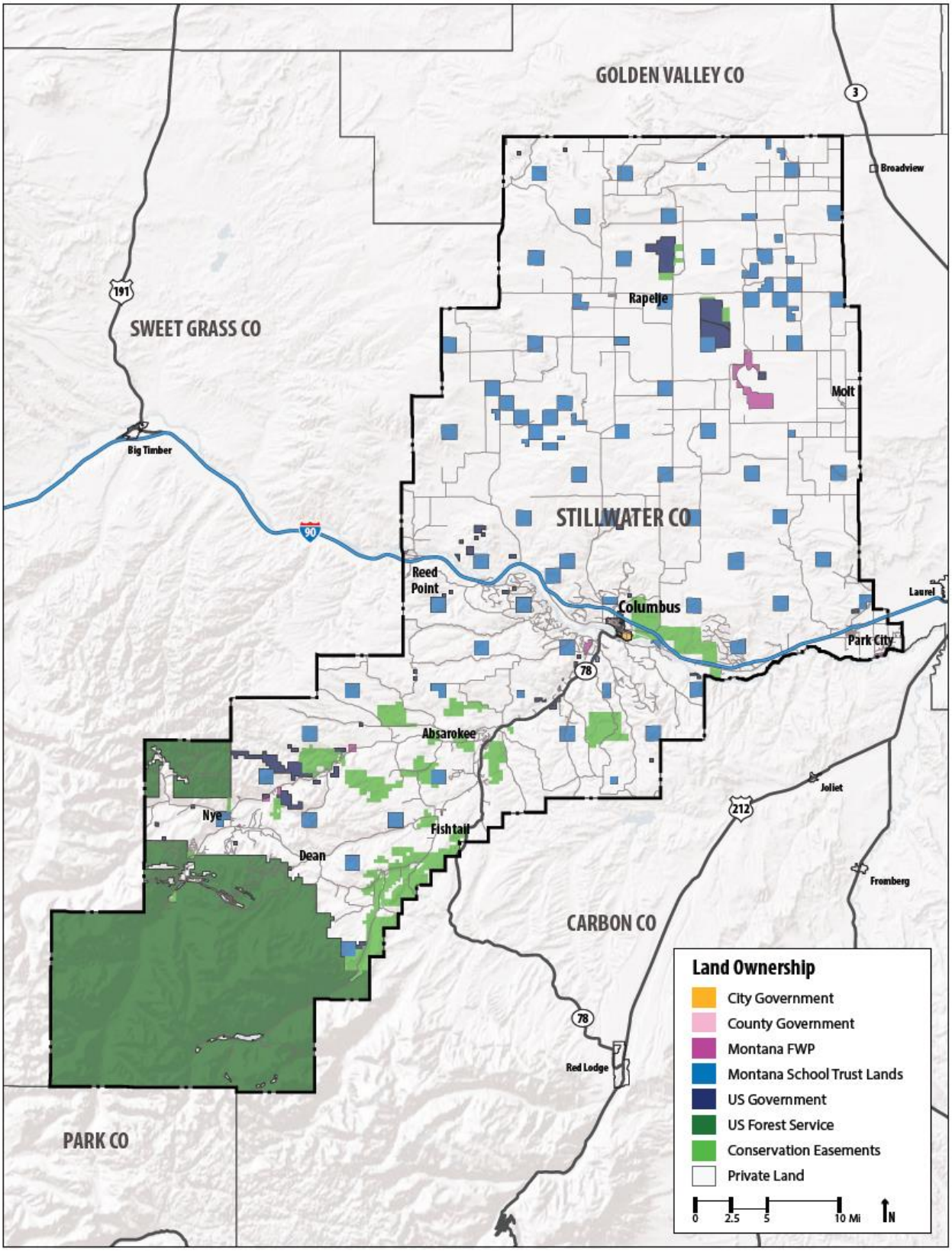
Private timberlands are somewhat scattered around the county. There are timbered coulees in the Big Coulee and Painted Robe drainages in the northern part of the county; forested hills along both sides of the Yellowstone River valley in the Reed Point and Columbus area; and timber stands along the foothills of the Beartooth Mountains from the West Fork Stillwater drainage to the West Rosebud drainage.

FEDERAL LANDS

Federal lands represent 17% of the total land area. These areas include national forest lands on the Custer National Forest in the southern part of the county, various smaller tracts of land administered by the Bureau of Land Management and two wildlife refuges in the northern part of the county. These federal lands are managed for multiple use including forestry, range, minerals, recreation and wildlife habitat.

STATE LANDS

About 46,000 acres are listed as state lands, which are 4% of the total land area, and are comprised primarily of school sections 16 and 36 throughout the county. Most of the state land is leased for agricultural use, but there are also 13 fishing access sites in the central and southern sections of the county for recreational use.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
SWEET GRASS CO
STILLWATER CO
CARBON CO
PARK CO
Broadview
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
Absarokee
Nye
Dean
Fishtail
Joliet
Fromberg
Red Lodge
191
90
78
212
3
Land Ownership
City Government
County Government
Montana FWP
Montana School Trust Lands
US Government
US Forest Service
Conservation Easements
Private Land
0
2.5
5
10 Mi
N

Tract Land

Tract lands are primarily larger developments previously exempted from subdivision review by state law. Most of these properties are located along the Yellowstone River valley and numerous tracts along the Stillwater River and Rosebud Creek drainages in the southern part of the county. There are no significant subdivisions located in the north end of the county other than the town sites of Rapelje, Molt, and Nora/Wheat Basin. The parcel size map shows three parcel size classifications.

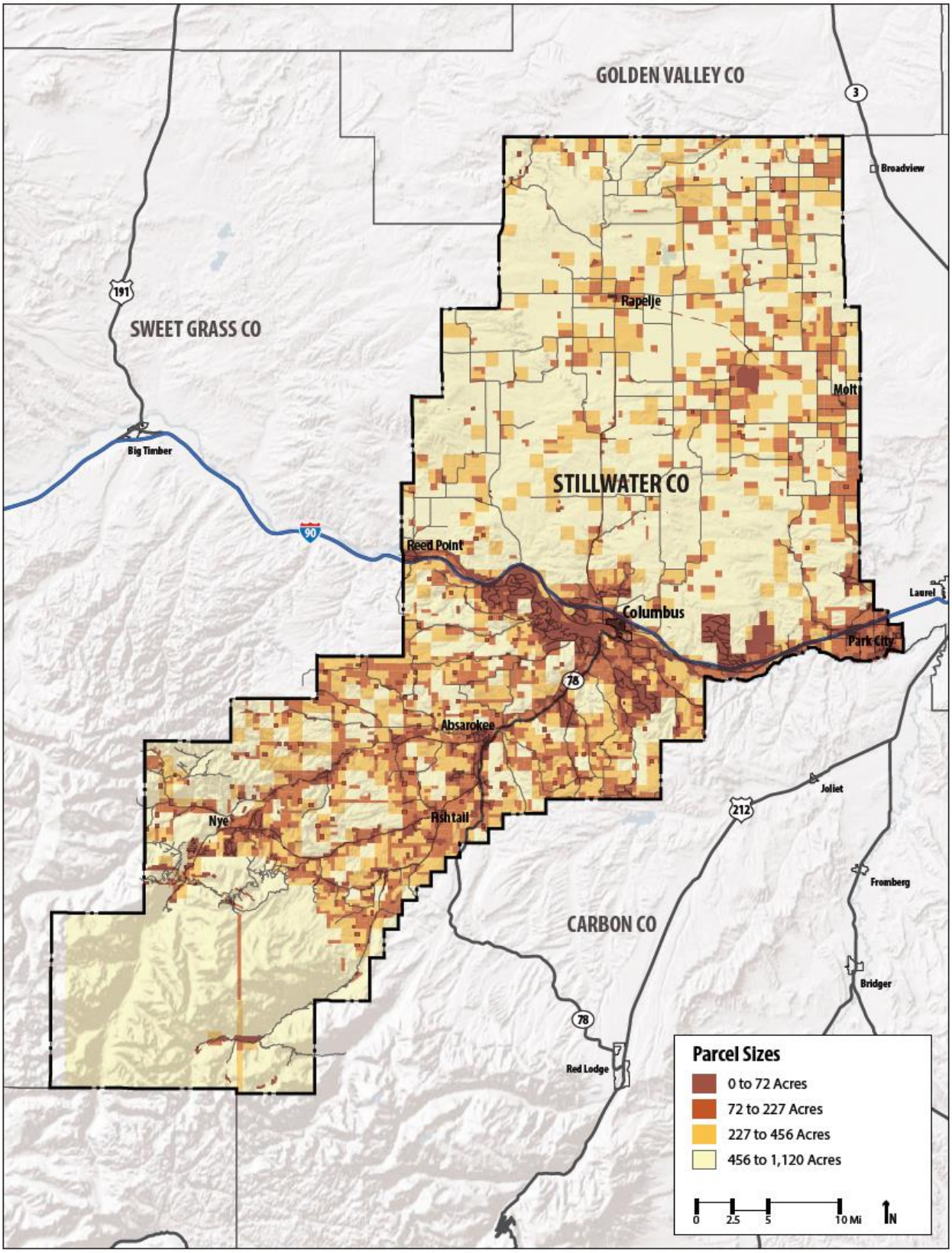
OTHER (UNCLASSIFIED)

The remainder of the county includes town lots, commercial, industrial tracts, exempt properties and unclassified lands. These properties are located in the town sites of Absarokee, Dean, Fishtail, Molt, Nye, Rapelje, Reed Point and Park City. These lots include both residential and commercial uses. The unincorporated town sites in Stillwater County have business districts of varying size and diversity of business activity. The condition of these districts varies. There are old buildings and newer buildings in various levels of repair. The Absarokee business district is situated along both sides of State Highway No. 78. The Fishtail and Nye business districts are along Highway 419. Park City business district is located south of the railroad tracks and extends to Interstate 90. The Reed Point business district is along Division Street and extends to the I-90 interchange. Rapelje business district is at the northern end of Highway 306. The platted town site of Nora/Wheat Basin is currently undeveloped.

Commercial tracts are located in or near the town sites of Absarokee, Dean, Fishtail, Molt, Nye, Rapelje, Reed Point and Park City. A variety of commercial businesses are represented including cafes, restaurants, groceries, motels, gas stations, hardware stores, ranch and farm supplies, gift and flower shops, antique stores, hair salons, bars, auto repair shops, insurance and real estate offices.

Railroad, utilities and the Stillwater mine site are the primary industrial properties in the county. Railroad property parallels the Yellowstone River through the central part of the county. Utilities are spread out throughout the county from the Mystic Lake Power Plant in the south to the 500kv power lines in northern Stillwater County. The SMC mine site is in the southwestern part of the county. .

Exempt properties include the Special K Ranch, church properties, community centers, senior citizen centers, and other non-profit organizations.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
3
Broadview
191
SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
90
Reed Point
Laurel
Columbus
Park City
78
Absarokee
Joliet
212
Nye
Fishtail
Fromberg
CARBON CO
Bridger
78
Red Lodge
Parcel Sizes
0 to 72 Acres
72 to 227 Acres
227 to 456 Acres
456 to 1,120 Acres
0
2.5
5
10 Mi
N

4.2 POPULATION:

The 2010 census showed Stillwater County with a population of 9,117 people. This is an increase from the 2000 Census, which determined a countywide population of 8,195 people. Of this number 1,893 people were counted the municipal limits of the Town of Columbus. Therefore the 2010 Census population of the county jurisdiction was 7,224.

County Population by Census Tracts

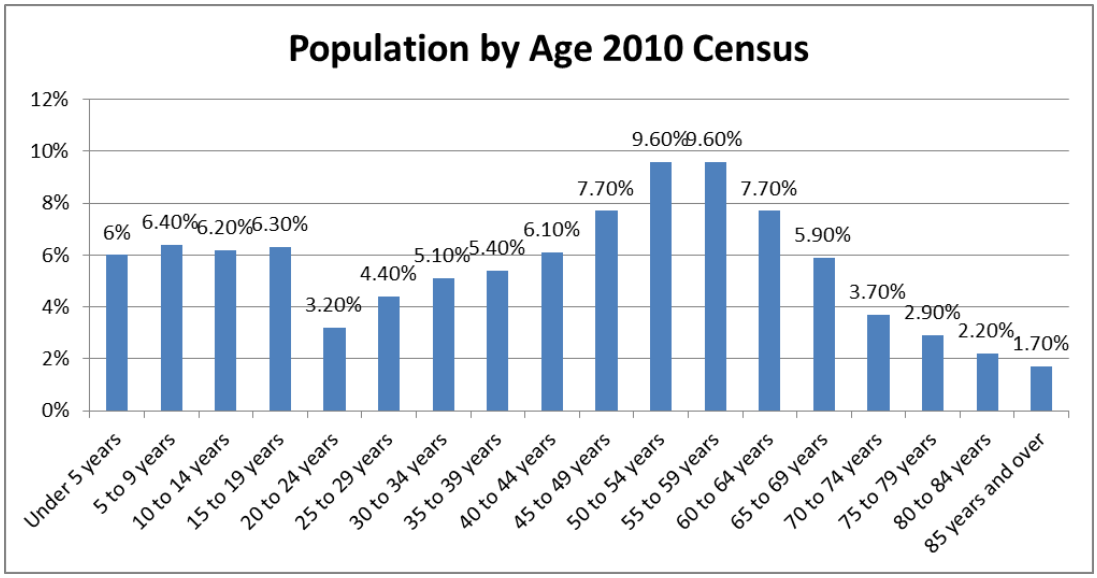
Stillwater County has four Census Tracts. The Columbus Census Tract was the most populous of the four tracts with 3,797 people, with 1,904 of these living outside of Columbus City Limits. Absarokee area had a population of 2,222. Park City area had a population of 2,331 and the North Stillwater 762767. The Population by Census Tract map (next page) shows the geographic distribution and also provides a comparison between 2000 Census and 2016 population estimate for Stillwater County.

Population Characteristics

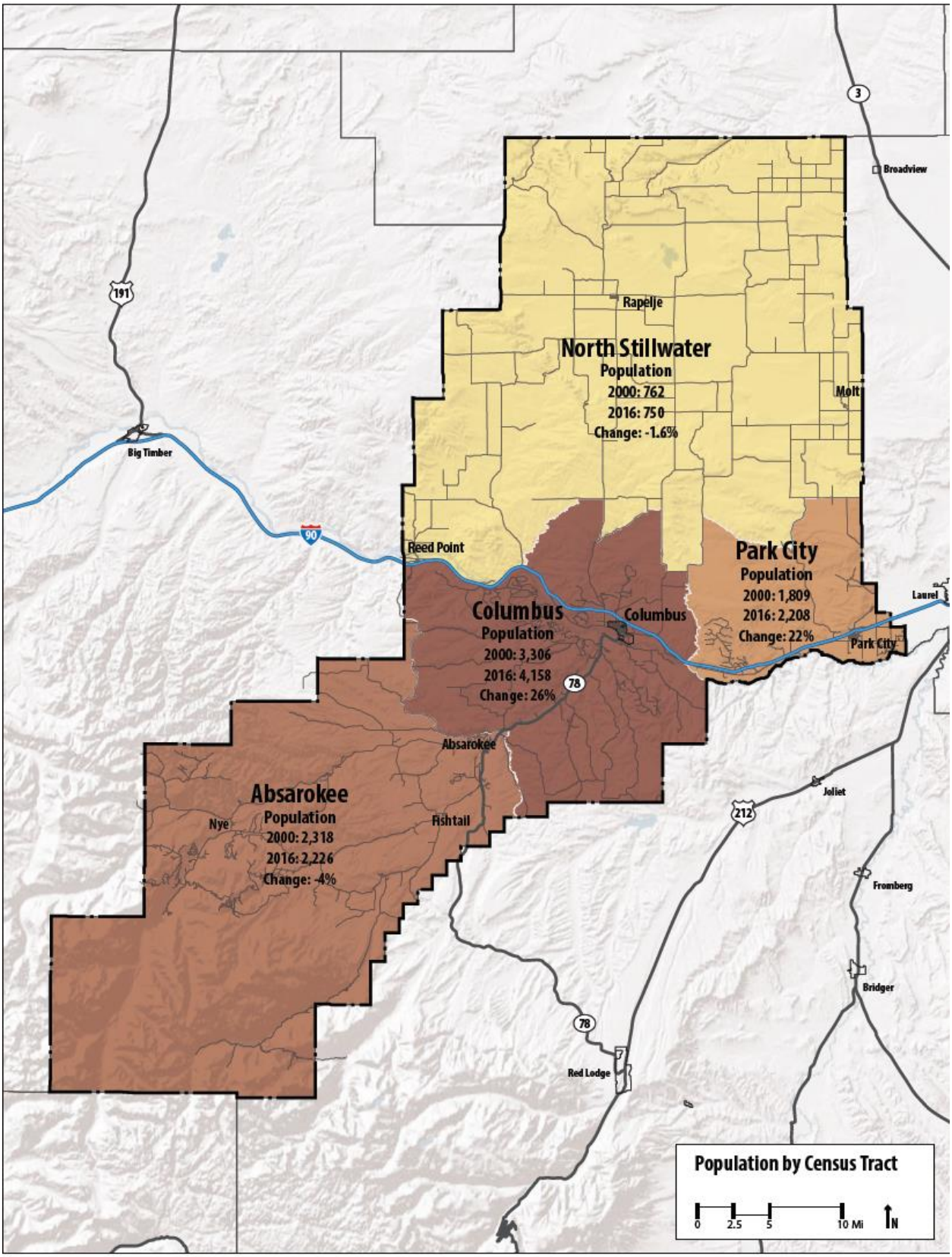
The 2010 Census collected data on the county population by gender, race, age groups, household type and education. A description of population characteristics follows.

Population by Age

The 2010 Census profile of general demographic characteristics provides information on the percentage of the total population by various age groups as displayed in the bar graph below. This information indicates the out migration that occurs with the 18-24 age groups after graduation from high school, relatively large groups between ages 25 to 64 as a result of employment opportunities, and the smallest age group is 85 and older.

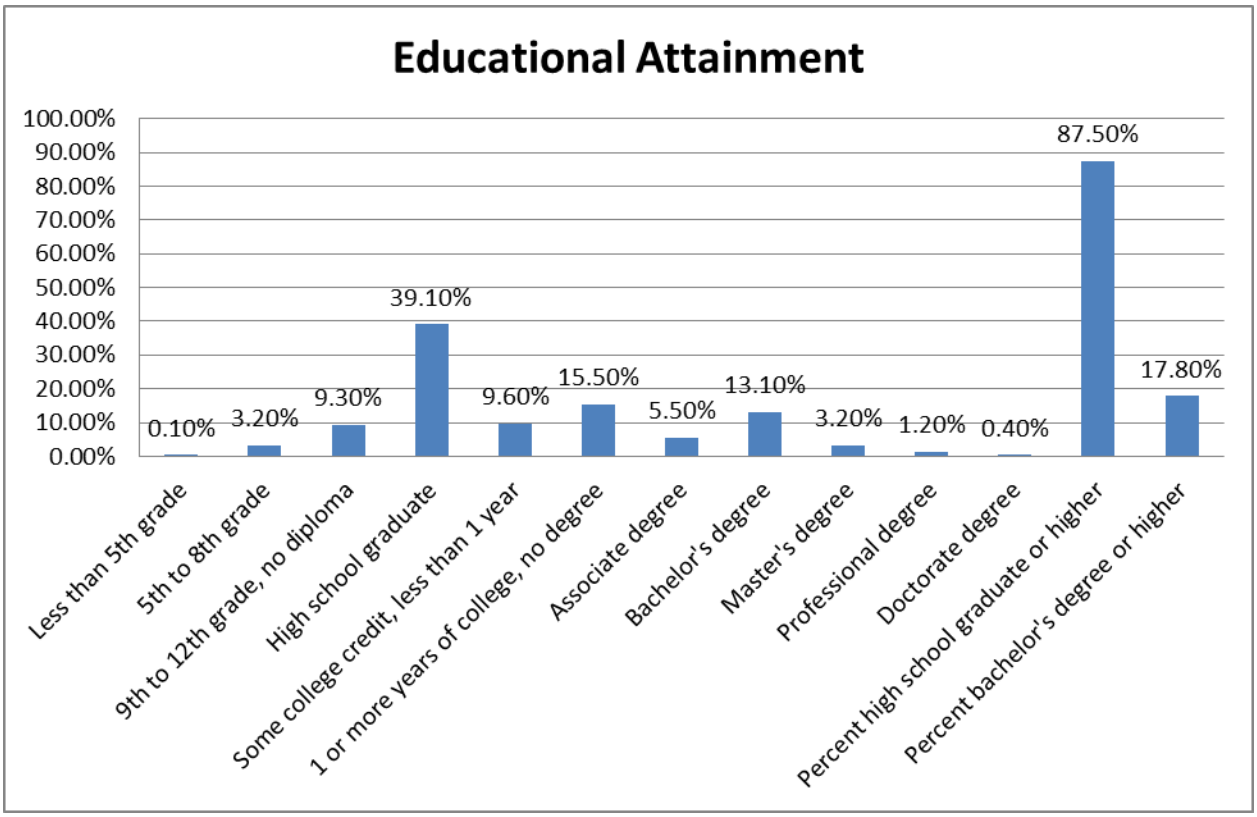


(Source: U.S. Census Bureau)


North Stillwater
Population
2000: 762
2016: 750
Change: -1.6%
Park City
Population
2000: 1,809
2016: 2,208
Change: 22%
Columbus
Population
2000: 3,306
2016: 4,158
Change: 26%
Absarokee
Population
2000: 2,318
2016: 2,226
Change: -4%
Rapelje
Molt
Broadview
Big Timber
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
Absarokee
Fishtail
Nye
Joliet
Fromberg
Bridger
Red Lodge
191
90
78
212
3
Population by Census Tract
0
2.5
5
10 Mi
N

Educational attainment

The 2010 Census provides information on the educational attainment as a percentage of the county population of the age 25 and older. 87.5 % of the population received at least a high school diploma, while nearly 18% have received a bachelor's degree or higher. 5.5 % have an associate's degree, over 13 % have a bachelor's degree and 4.4 % have graduate or professional degrees. The graph below shows the educational attainment of the Stillwater County population.



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

Households by Type

The 2010 Census profile of general demographic characteristics provides information on the total households by type. Total households counted in the county were 3,796. The average household size was 2.37 people and the average family size was 2.84 people.

Households	**2010**	**%**
Total households	3,796	
Family households	2,657	70
Non-family households	1,138	30
Average household size	2.37	n/a
Average family size	2.84	n/a

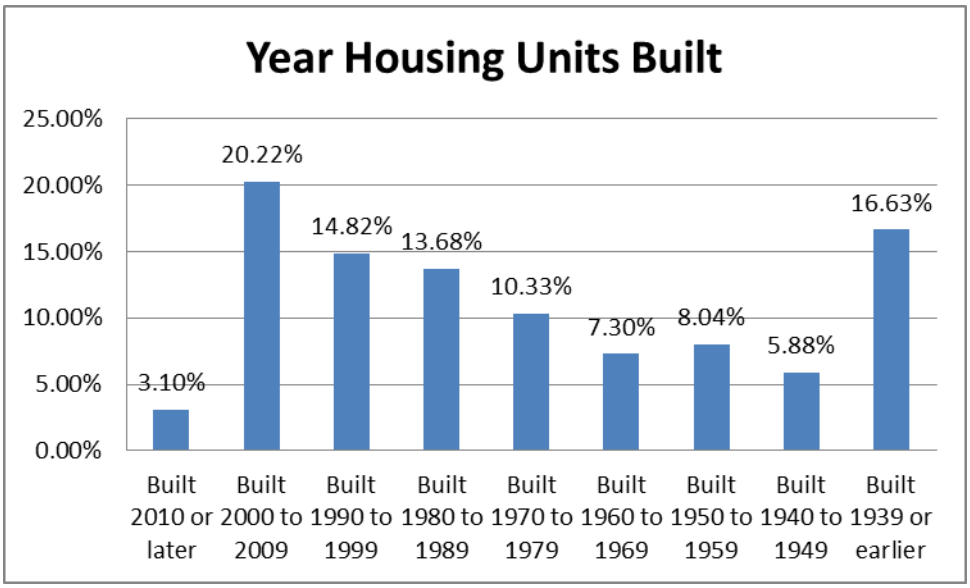
4.3 HOUSING NEEDS:

The total number of housing units reported for Stillwater County in the 2010 Census was 4,803. The map of housing units by Census tract (page 4-9) shows the distribution of housing units around the county and provides a comparison with the 2000 data. The Columbus tract had 1,855 housing units in 2010 with 843 of those being within Columbus corporate limits. Therefore, the county jurisdiction had a total of 3,960 housing units.

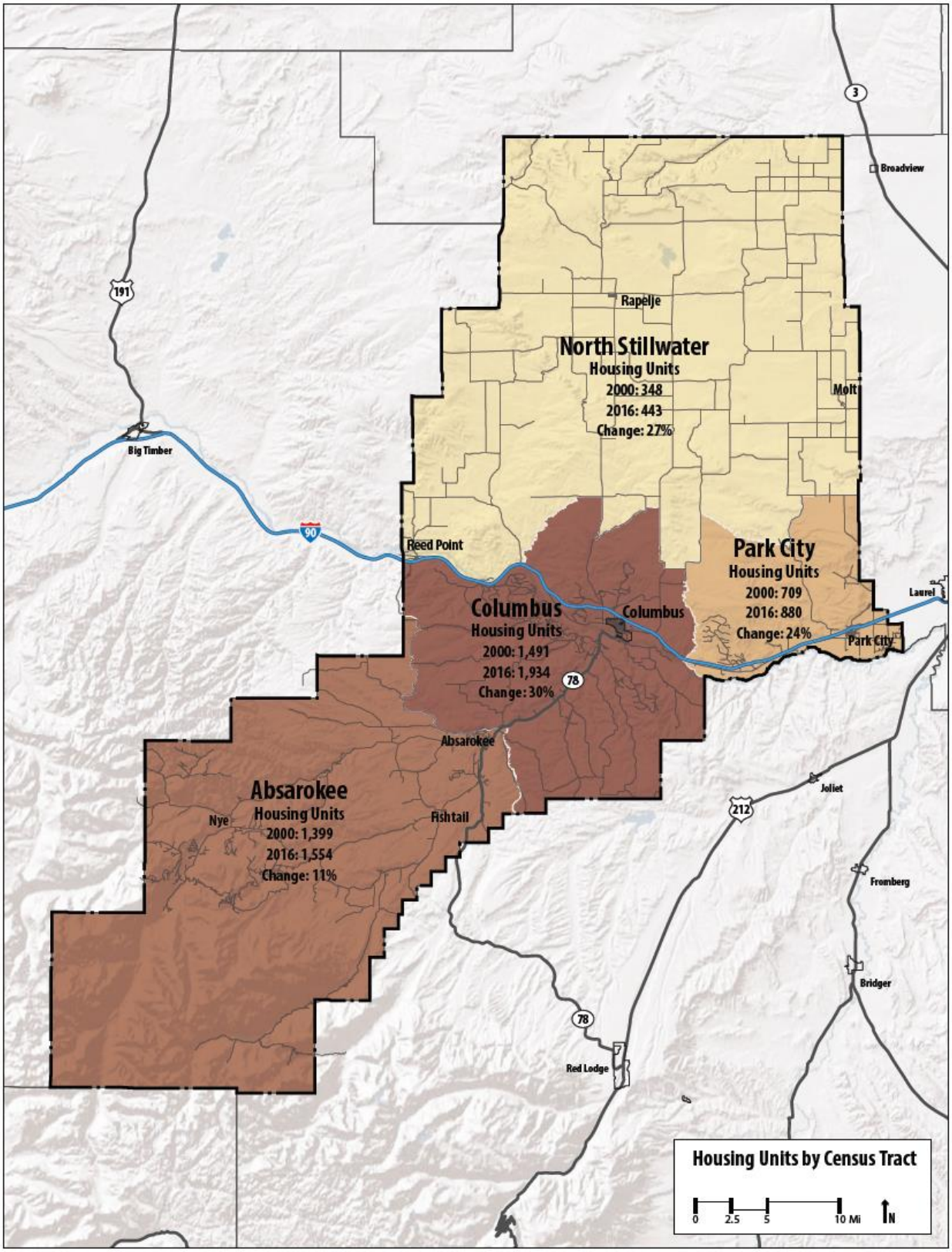
Housing Units	**2010**
Stillwater County total	4,803
Columbus Area	843
County Planning Jurisdiction	3,960

Year housing units built

The following graph shows the relative age of housing units in Stillwater County from 1939 or earlier through the time the 2000 Census was taken in March, 2000.



(Source: U.S. Census Bureau)


North Stillwater
Housing Units
2000: 348
2016: 443
Change: 27%
Park City
Housing Units
2000: 709
2016: 880
Change: 24%
Columbus
Housing Units
2000: 1,491
2016: 1,934
Change: 30%
Absarokee
Housing Units
2000: 1,399
2016: 1,554
Change: 11%
Rapelje
Molt
Broadview
Big Timber
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
Absarokee
Nye
Fishtail
Joliet
Fromberg
Bridger
Red Lodge
191
90
78
212
3
Housing Units by Census Tract
0
2.5
5
10 Mi
N

Structural Characteristics

The majority of all residences have been built since 1970. The majority of housing units have five or more rooms and 3 or more bedrooms.

Natural gas is used to heat nearly 50% of all housing units, use of propane is over 25%, electric heat is over 11%, wood 11.5 % and other alternative fuels are used in the remainder of the housing units.

Single family residences continue to comprise the majority of housing types in the county. Over 80% of the housing units are single family residences. About 11.5% of the housing units are mobile homes and the remaining homes are multi-family residences or other alternative housing units.

The majority of residences in the county have individual wells with the exception of residents served by the water systems in Absarokee, Columbus, Rapelje or other potable sources of water. The majority of residences have septic tanks for sewage disposal.

Housing Occupancy

The total housing units included 3,796 (79%) occupied and 1,007 (21%) vacant units. Owner occupied units were 78% or 2,960 units and renter occupied units were 22% or 836 units. Vacant units reported in the 2010 Census include 655 seasonal, recreational and occasional use housing units. Therefore, only 7.3% or 352 of the total units were vacant.

Characteristic	2010	%
Total Units	4,803	100
Owner Occupied	2,960	61.6
Renter Occupied	836	17.4
Occupied Units	3,796	79
Vacant Units	352	7.3
Seasonal/recreational	655	13.6
Total Vacant Units	1,007	20.9

Housing Costs

Information on the cost associated with housing, including monthly rent paid by renters is also included in the Census. The median monthly cost with a mortgage was $876. The median monthly gross rent was $652.

Subdivision Activity

Stillwater County has adopted Subdivision Regulations pursuant to state law and regularly updates the Regulations to ensure compliance with changes in law. The Stillwater County

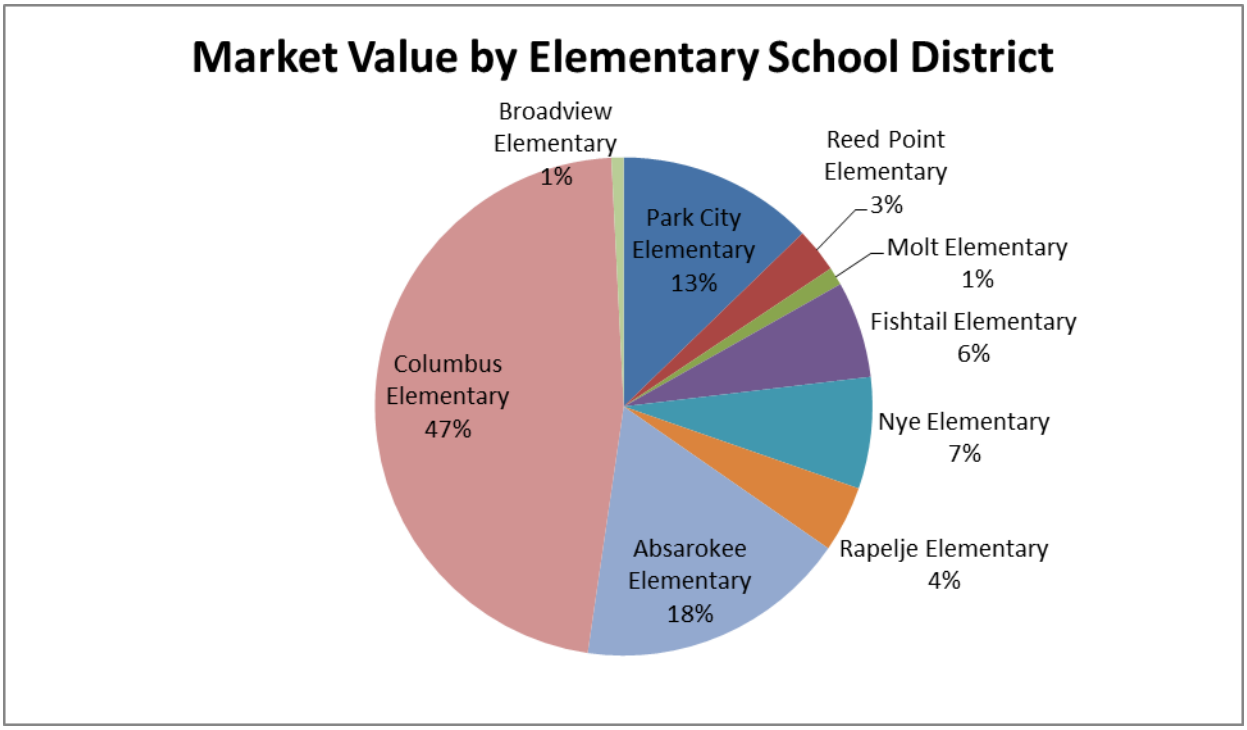
Planning Board is made up of nine members appointed by the County Commission and reviews subdivisions for their compliance with the Regulations, making recommendations to the Commission. Exemptions to subdivision law and the County regulations are processed and reviewed administratively by the County's planning staff.

Subdivision activity was more widespread prior to the 2008 housing market crisis than it is currently. The planning office reviews an average of seven subdivision and 25 exemption requests each year, resulting in an average of 26 new lots created by subdivision and 11 new tracts created by exemption each year. These numbers are nearly half what they were prior to the housing market crisis.

4.4 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

AREA ECONOMY

The 2017 market valuation of Stillwater County was $1,697,749,146. The City of Columbus represents $312,449,179 in market value. Therefore the county planning jurisdiction has a market value of $1,385,299,967. The chart below shows the relative distribution of market value by elementary school district.



Taxable valuation

The 2017 taxable valuation of Stillwater County was $41,267,923. The City of Columbus represents $7,180,545 in taxable value. Therefore the county planning jurisdiction has a taxable value of more than $34,087,378. The relative distribution of 2017 taxable value for elementary school districts is similar to the market value distribution shown in the pie graph above. Molt and Broadview are lowest with around $600,000 in taxable valuation. Columbus has the largest taxable valuation at $18.2 million. Absarokee ($5.8 million), Rapelje ($4.5 million) and Park City ($4.4 million) are the next highest. Fishtail sits at approximately $3.5 million, while Nye comes in at just under $2.5 million and Reed Point at slightly less than $1.2 million.

Employment by type of industry

The principal economic activities in Stillwater County for employment include farm and agricultural services, mining, manufacturing, services and professional, construction and government. The largest employer in Stillwater County is Sibanye-Stillwater, which operates a

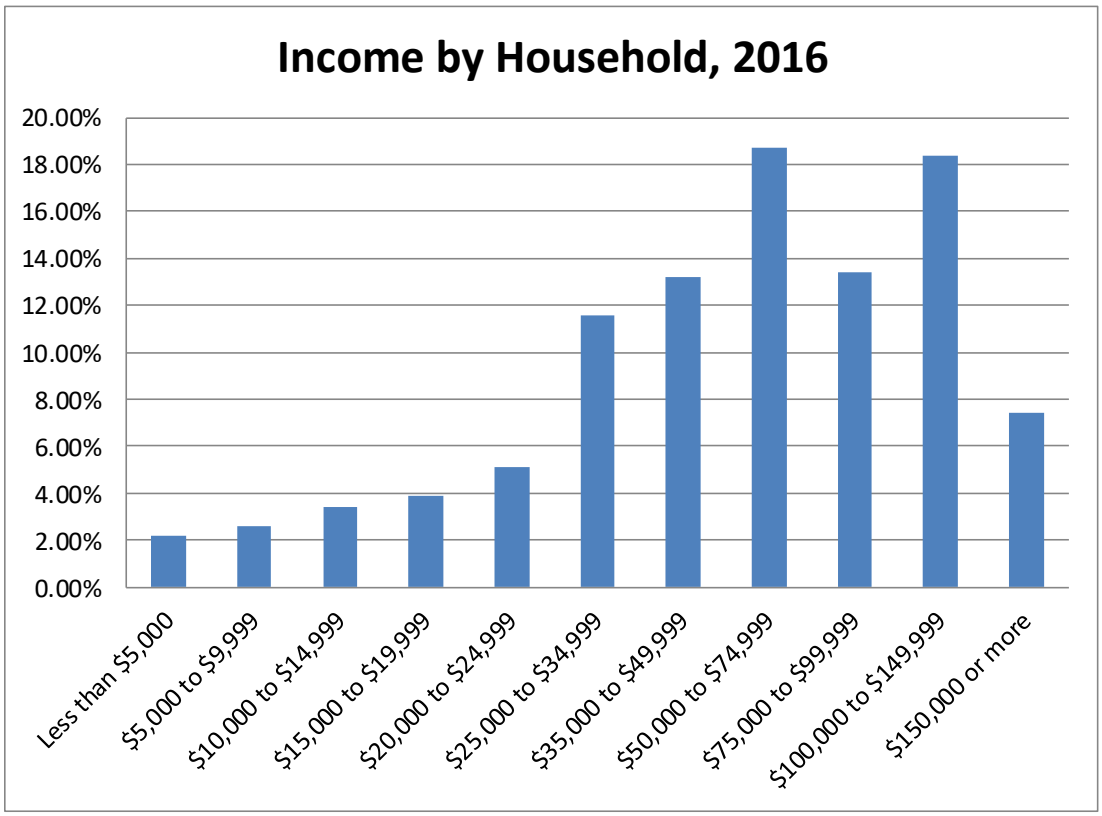
platinum and palladium mine in the Beartooth Mountains, and is one of the top 20 employers in the state. Other major employers in the County include Montana Silversmiths, Beartooth Healthcare Community, Columbus IGA Plus, McDonalds, Special K Ranch, Stillwater Community Hospital, and Town Pump.

Employment Status

The total civilian labor force in Stillwater County was estimated to be 4,713 in 2016. . The Stillwater County unemployment rate was reported to be 3.8%.

Income

The median household income was estimated to be $59,603 in 2016. The following chart shows the relative distribution of household income by income bracket.



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Additional Economic Information

Stillwater County has an Economic Development Department and employees a full-time Economic Development Coordinator. Stillwater County also has an approved Overall Economic Development Plan and is a member of the Beartooth Resource Conservation & Development Economic Development District.

4.5 LOCAL SERVICES

STILLWATER COUNTY

Stillwater County is a political subdivision of the state of Montana with general government powers only. Stillwater County government is limited to actions specifically authorized by Montana law.

Stillwater County is governed by a three-member Board of Commissioners and has an elected Attorney, Clerk & Recorder, Clerk of District Court, Justice of the Peace, Sheriff, Treasurer and part-time Superintendent of Schools. Duties of county officials are specified by Montana law. Budgetary, contractual, payroll, and insurance authority are the responsibility of the County Commissioners.

A number of citizen boards are appointed by the Commissioners to oversee or provide public input on specific areas such as solid waste, library, airport, planning, health, and weed control.

Stillwater County provides numerous services typical of a rural county government. Law enforcement services and volunteer search and rescue unit are budgeted through the County Sheriff's Office. The search and rescue vehicles and equipment are housed at the search and rescue building in Columbus. Road and bridge, law enforcement, and solid waste are the largest departments in the county organization. Other services include environmental health, fire control, civil defense, noxious weed control, planning, economic development, extension, justice and district court, mental health, and vital statistics.

Services such as planning and emergency service dispatching are coordinated with the Town of Columbus. Mental health, juvenile detention, and long-term jail services are provided in cooperation with regional government associations or non-profit entities. Capital projects in the county are often funded through grants applied for and coordinated with various departments.

Special districts, which are legal entities that provide a specific service, are established by the county commissioners following a petition and hearing process as provided in state law. These districts are budgeted and accounted for through enterprise accounts. Funds for the enterprise accounts are collected through the taxation process from the property owners within a special district that benefit from the specific service. Administration of these Districts is handled by commissioner-appointed boards. There are representatives from all areas of the county on the boards. Rate increases must receive commissioner approval.

Additional state and federal funds that are received are enhanced 911, gas tax, junk vehicles, underground storage tanks, county land planning coal tax, metal mine tax reserve, payment in lieu of taxes (PILT), alcohol funds, and predatory animal. Funds in this category are provided by the federal/state government or from non-tax sources. They are included in the county budgeting process and can only be used for specified purposes. Drug Forfeiture funds allow the expenditure of funds resulting from the sale of property seized during drug busts. Records Preservation funds are collected from document filing fees for the express purpose of insuring

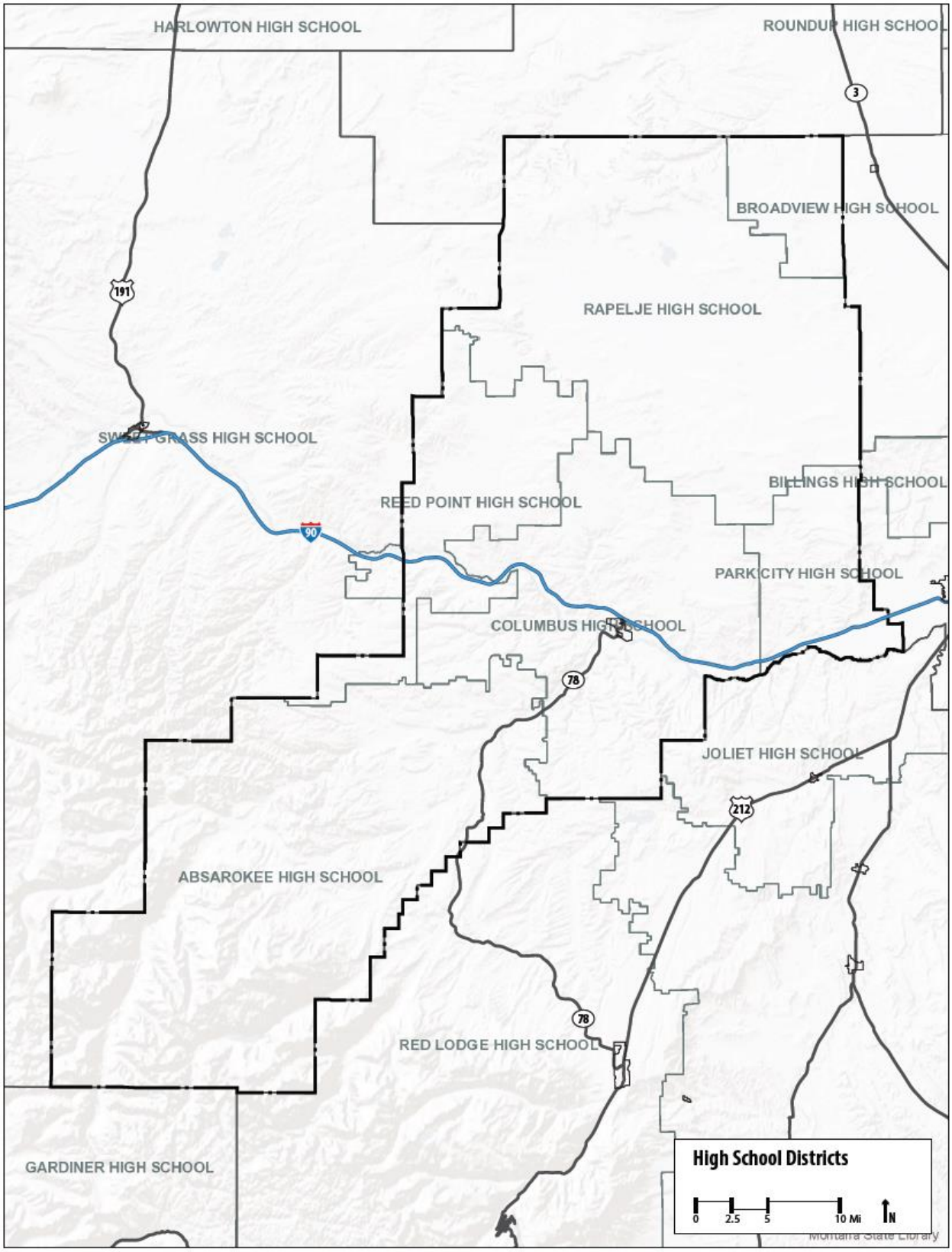
that county records are preserved for posterity.
Capital improvement funds include junk vehicle, library, county fire, general fund, road depreciation reserve and bridge depreciation reserve. Funds have been set aside so that facilities and equipment can be upgraded. Metal Mine Reserve funds accrue from metal mines license taxes distributed by the state. These funds are distributed annually between the affected high schools, elementary school districts and the county. A trust fund has also been established to handle the tail-end impacts from mine closure or reduction in work force. Grant funds have also been budgeted for projects funded through grants under federal and state grant programs.

County-owned properties are used for parks, county shops, fire stations, cemeteries, sewer lagoons, solid waste sites and a gravel pit, as well as road rights-of-way. Stillwater County owns several properties in Columbus, including the County Courthouse, West Annex, County Attorney's office, fairgrounds, the Museum of the Beartooths, and the County library. There has been discussion in recent years about building new or remodeling some County buildings to make better use of space and provide a wider range of service. These discussion have included potentially building a new courthouse, law and justice center, remodeling the West Annex, and construction of a new library/county center.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Stillwater County has five high school districts and eight elementary school districts plus a portion of the Broadview district. The following maps show the location of the high school and elementary school districts. Some of the school districts extend into neighboring counties. Generally, county high schools have total enrollments of about 450 students, and elementary/middle school enrollments of about 1000 students.

Nye Elementary School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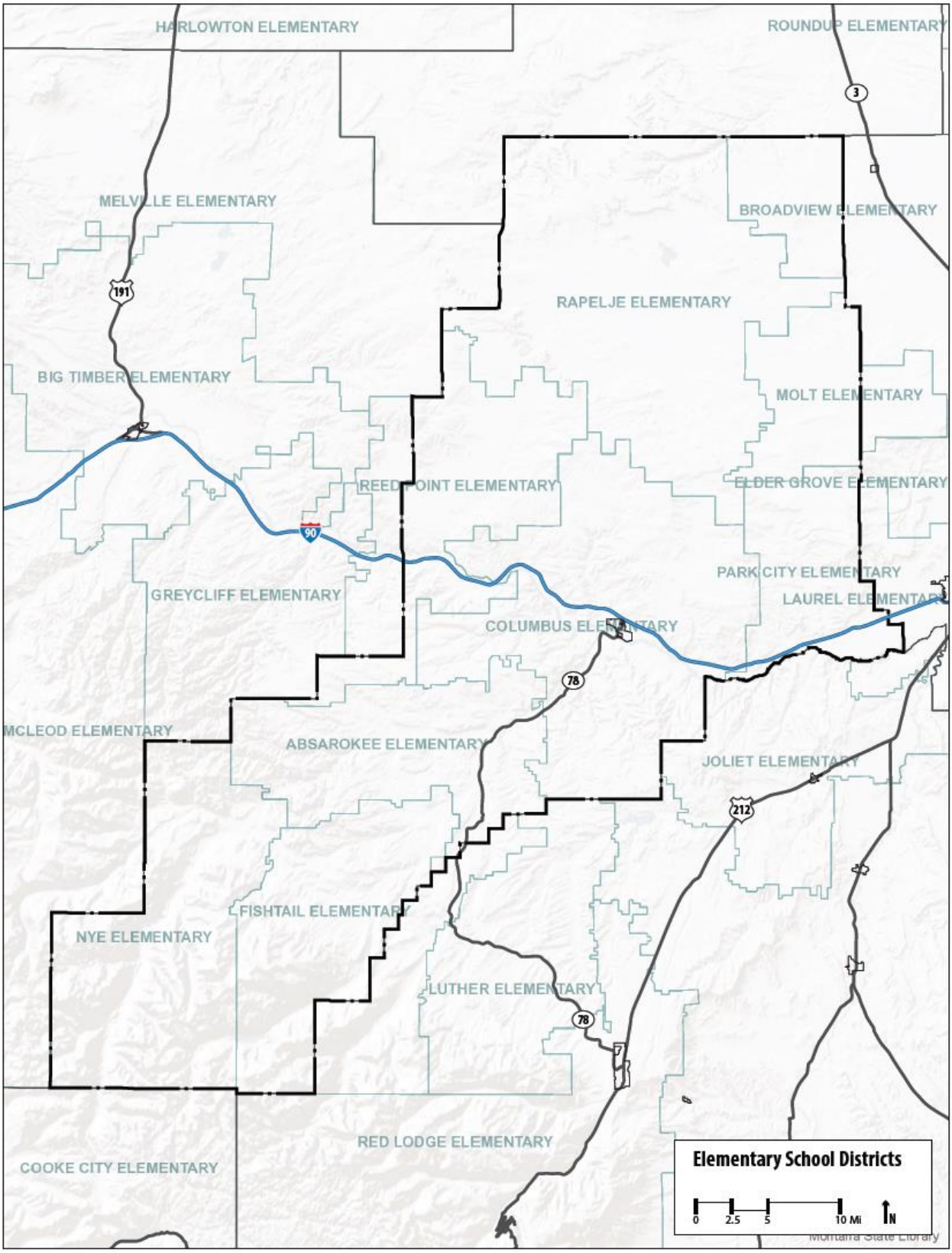
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REED POINT ELEMENTARY
ELDER GROVE ELEMENTARY
PARK CITY ELEMENTARY
GREYCLIFF ELEMENTARY
LAUREL ELEMENTARY
COLUMBUS ELEMENTARY
MCLEOD ELEMENTARY
ABSAROKEE ELEMENTARY
JOLIET ELEMENTARY
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FIRE DISTRICTS

Fire protection in Stillwater County is handled through a combination of rural fire districts and fire departments. At this time, all the departments and districts operate with paid and volunteer firefighters. The county commissioners have the responsibility of providing rural wildland fire protection to the county. The Commission appoints a County Fire Warden and cooperates with federal and state fire protection agencies. The County Rural Fire Warden acts as the liaison between the Commission and the fire districts.

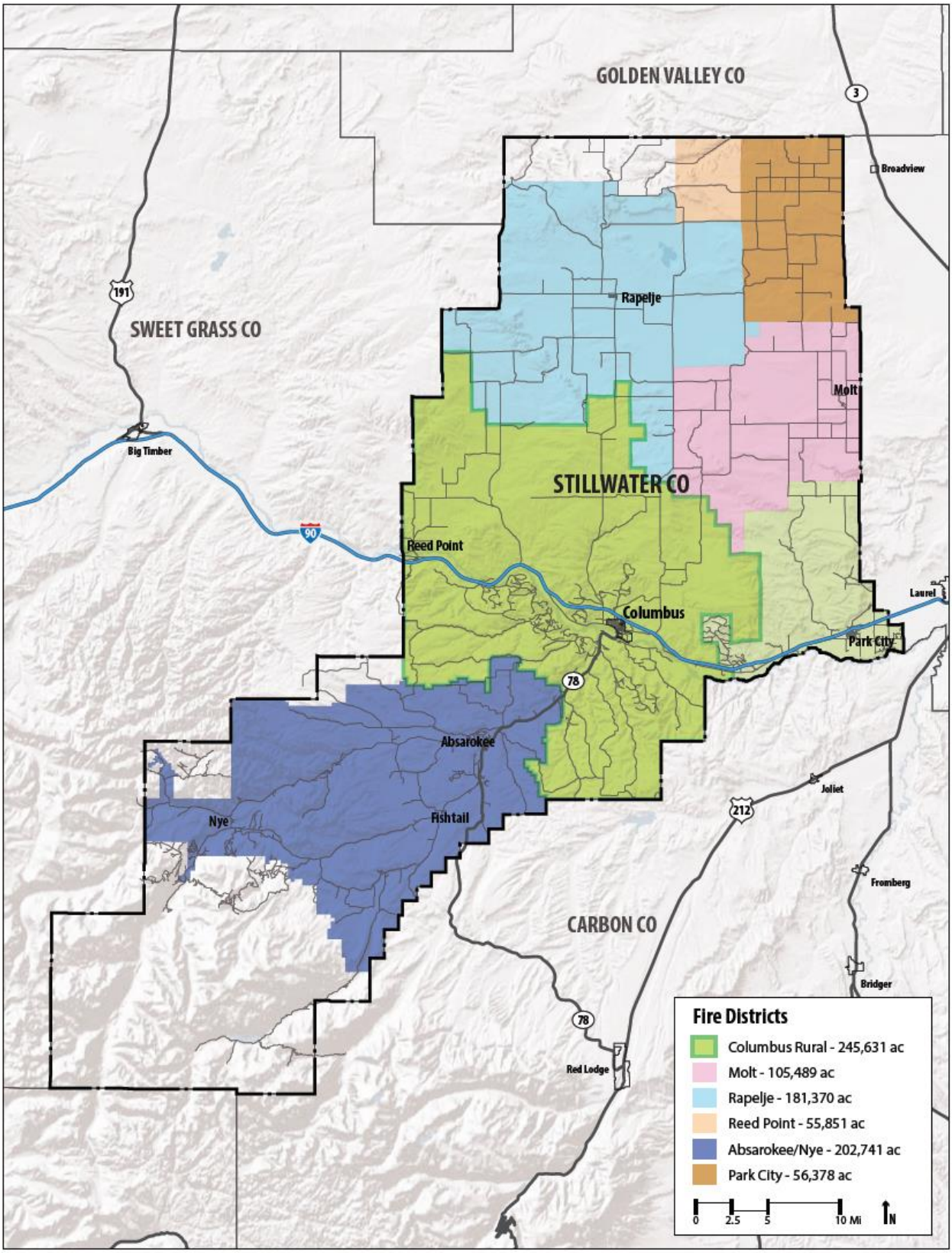
In Stillwater County, there are four rural fire districts. The four fire districts in the county are Absarokee, Broadview, Columbus, and Park City. The Broadview district includes an area in the four counties of Stillwater, Yellowstone, Golden Valley, and Musselshell. In addition there are seven volunteer fire Departments or Companies: Absarokee, Broadview, Columbus Rural, Molt, Park City, Rapelje, and Nye. The following map shows the location of the fire districts.

Each fire district is served by a board of trustees elected from residents of the district. The rural fire boards prepare an annual budget for the fire district, and administer the budget and any special levies. The board has the duty and authority to provide firefighting apparatus, equipment, and facilities for the protection of the district. The board also has the responsibility to create fire companies or departments.

The Chief or a representative from each department meet for rural fire council meetings as needed, but at least quarterly. The County Fire Warden is a member of the County Fire Council, and acts as a liaison between the Fire Council and the Board of County Commissioners. Written mutual aid agreements have been signed among and between all fire districts or departments in the county, as well as with Sweet Grass, Carbon, and Yellowstone counties, and similar agreements have been reached with state and federal fire control agencies. The departments within the county also participate in the state mutual aid program.

The Absarokee Rural Fire District #1 was formed in 1955 and covers approximately 313 square mile area, including the communities of Absarokee, Dean, Fishtail, and Nye. There are two departments in the Absarokee Rural Fire District, Absarokee and Nye. Each department has its own chief. The Absarokee fire hall was constructed in the 40s. A new fire hall was completed in 2002, and the old hall sold to the Absarokee Water District. The Absarokee Department has the ability to provide structure, wildlands, rescue, EMS, vehicle accident, and haz-mat protection.

In Nye, a fire hall was constructed in 1973, and the Nye Volunteer Fire Department was formed in January 1974. Additions were constructed on the fire hall in 1988 and 2006. The Nye Department is able to provide structure, wildlands, rescue, EMS, vehicle accidents, hazmat, and other specialized protection.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SWEET GRASS CO
STILLWATER CO
CARBON CO
Broadview
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
Absarokee
Nye
Fishtail
Joliet
Fromberg
Bridger
Red Lodge
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78
212
Fire Districts
Columbus Rural - 245,631 ac
Molt - 105,489 ac
Rapelje - 181,370 ac
Reed Point - 55,851 ac
Absarokee/Nye - 202,741 ac
Park City - 56,378 ac
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The Park City Rural Fire District #2 was formed in 1956. Its 100 square mile area extends from the Pine Crest residential development to the Yellowstone County line. The original portion of the fire hall in Park City was constructed in 1956, and has been expanded since that time. The Park City Department has the ability to provide structure, wildlands, vehicle accident, rescue, and hazmat response.

The Columbus Rural Fire District #3 was formed in 1989. The Columbus Rural Fire District covers a 375 square mile area extending towards the communities of Absarokee, Reed Point,Park City and Rapelje. The Columbus Rural Fire Department is able to provide structure, wildland, rescue, EMS, vehicle accident, hazmat, and other specialized protection such as water, mountain, and confined rescue. The town of Columbus Volunteer Fire Department has existed since 1909. The fire hall and training facility they jointly occupy was constructed in 2002. The Reed Point Volunteer Fire Company (now Columbus Rural) was formed in 1986, incorporated in 2001, and was annexed by Columbus Rural Fire District #3 in 2011. Its 92 square mile area extends halfway to the communities of Columbus and Rapelje. There are two fire buildings in Reed Point (Station 2), one was constructed in 1986, and the second was constructed in 2002. Reed Point fell under the direction of the five rural fire board members and all policies/procedures of the Columbus Rural Fire Department.

Approximately 83 square miles of the Broadview Volunteer Fire District #4 is located in Stillwater County, situated in the county's extreme northeast corner. The Broadview Fire District relies on volunteers based at the fire hall in Broadview, located approximately 15 miles from the Stillwater County line.

The Molt Volunteer Fire Company was formed in 1980, but is not located in an established fire district. An approximately 154 square mile area north of Park City and east of Rapelje are covered by the Molt volunteers. The fire hall in Molt was constructed in the 1970s. The Molt Fire Company is equipped and trained to provide wildlands, and vehicle accident protection.

The Rapelje Volunteer Fire Company covers approximately 312 square miles that includes a substantial portion of northern Stillwater County. The Company is not located in an established fire district.

The Reed Point Volunteer Fire Company was formed in 1986 and incorporated in 2001. Its 92 square mile area extends halfway to the communities of Columbus and Rapelje. There are two fire buildings in Reed Point, one was constructed in 1986, and the second was constructed in 2002. The Reed Point Fire Department is equipped for and is currently training for fighting structural fires.

Limitations to fire service in Stillwater County are that the North County communities of Rapelje, and Molt have equipment and training primarily to fight grass fires. This limitation is considered when reviewing proposed subdivisions and may be reflected in the insurance rates paid by property owners in these communities.

The Stillwater County Fire Department Directory provides more detailed information on the number of firefighters certified, fire fighting abilities, equipment, and radio frequencies used.

WATER & SEWER DISTRICTS

In addition to county services, there are three water and sewer districts; Absarokee, Park City and Reed Point. These water and sewer districts were established as autonomous districts and are governed by a five-member board elected by those in the district. Absarokee sewer district was established as a rural special improvement district governed by the county commissioners with a part-time manager overseeing daily operations of the systems.

SPECIAL LIGHT DISTRICTS

There are also three light districts; Absarokee, Park City and Reed Point. The funds to pay for the street lights in these districts are collected through the taxation process and paid by the county.

PRIVATE UTILITIES

Natural Gas and Oil

The County is traversed by high pressure natural gas transmission lines and oil pipelines. A 16 inch oil pipeline was constructed across the northern part of the county in 1995 to transport crude oil to refineries in the Billings/Laurel area. There are gathering lines in the Lake Basin area, a compressor station (built in 1974) southwest of Molt and an 8 inch high pressure transmission line from the compressor station to Laurel. A four inch natural gas transmission line is fed from the Lake Basin Fields and is tied into their main gas transmission system. Natural gas is piped to Billings from northern Stillwater County.

Northwestern Energy currently provides natural gas service to the town sites within the county except Park City which is served by Montana Dakota Utilities. Propane is also used by many rural customers.

Express Pipeline Inc. constructed and is currently operating a 24 inch crude oil pipeline extending approximately 43 miles across northern Stillwater County. Altamont Gas Transmission Company proposed constructing a 30 inch natural gas pipeline across northern Stillwater County. The Environmental Impact Statement was completed for this project, but the pipeline has not been constructed.

Electricity

Four companies currently provide electrical service to Stillwater County. They are Northwestern Energy, Beartooth Electric, Yellowstone Valley Electric Co-op and Fergus Electric. Fergus Electric provides the electrical service for the Big Coulee area in the northern most part of the county, Yellowstone Valley Electric Co-op provides electrical service for eastern portions of the county along the Yellowstone County line in the rural Park City and Molt areas, Beartooth Electric provides electrical service in rural areas of the county all the way from Rapelje to Nye and Fishtail area. Northwestern Energy serves Absarokee, Columbus, Reed Point, Park City,

Stillwater Mine and some of the rural areas along with the other electric providers.

The only power generating plant in the county is located at Mystic Lake in southern Stillwater County. However, there is increasing development of wind resources in the County,k especially north of Reed Point.

Telephone

There are three telephone companies providing local service to Stillwater County. They are Century Link, Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc., and Project Telephone Company. Triangle Telephone Cooperative Association, Inc. serves the northern part of the county, Century Link serves central areas of the county and Project Telephone Company serves southern Stillwater County.

Much of the local telephone service has been upgraded with the installation of fiber optic lines from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's. The improvements have provided faster and clearer telecommunications, the availability of internet, and other enhanced services. The enhanced 911 emergency communication system was installed in Stillwater County in 2004.

Satellite and wireless telecommunications are also available in the county. Cellular phone service is also available in the county from several providers. Verizon and AT&T are currently the main providers. Microwave relay towers that are used for land line phone service are located in various places in the county.

Television and Radio

Cable and satellite television is also available with numerous channels and packages to choose from. Cable service is within the county, primarily Charter Communications. Local television stations are broadcast from Billings. Numerous radio stations are broadcast in the region.

MEDICAL and EMERGENCY SERVICES

Ambulance Services

Two volunteer ambulance services exist in unincorporated areas of Stillwater County, located in Absarokee and Park City. The Absarokee Volunteer Ambulance Service relies on volunteer emergency medical technicians (EMTs) and operates from the Absarokee Fire Hall. The Park City Volunteer Ambulance Service has volunteer EMTs. There are also four Quick Response Units with EMT's or first responders in Molt, Rapelje, Reed Point and Broadview. The Columbus Ambulance Service, operating from the Columbus Fire Department, provides service to areas within Stillwater County as well. The Columbus Ambulance Service is staffed with a combination of volunteer and paid EMT's.

Stillwater Billings Clinic

The Stillwater Hospital Association was formed in 1914 and operated the Stillwater Community Hospital in a two story brick building in Columbus until the 1940's, when a new brick building was constructed and served as home to Stillwater Community Hospital until 2012. Billings Clinic constructed a new state of the art facility on the northeast side of Columbus in 2012. The new facility integrates clinic and hospital services and includes a 10-bed acute care facility.

Mental Health Services

South Central Montana Regional Mental Health Center also has a satellite office in Columbus. Out patient services include home visits, emergency services, consultation and education, services to alcoholics and drug abusers, screening and diagnosis, aftercare, services to children and elderly clients are also provided.

Absarokee Medical Clinic

The Absarokee Medical Clinic is operated by St. Vincent's Health Center and provides local residents an opportunity to visit with area physicians, and also provide a venue for outpatient surgical procedures.

Meadowlark Assisted Living

Constructed in 2000 as an adjunct to the Stillwater Community Hospital, this County-owned facility consists of nineteen apartments for senior citizens, plus an 80-seat dining facility. It is operated by Caslen Living Centers, Inc., under contract with the County.

Private Convalescent Center

Beartooth Manor, also known by its prior name of Stillwater Convalescent Center, is an 82-bed nursing home located in Columbus that was constructed in 1973. This privately-owned facility also offers outpatient physical therapy and home health care.

Senior Citizen Centers

The communities of Absarokee, Columbus, and Rapelje host senior's center organizations which provide a local place where senior citizens may meet, have events, and enjoy regular hot meals. All are incorporated as non-profit organizations.

The Absarokee Senior Center is located on Woodard Avenue (Highway 78), and is owned by the local senior's organization. The Columbus seniors also own their Senior Center on Palladium Place. The Rapelje seniors meet in the community-owned Stockman's Café, which functions as a community center.

CEMETERY DISTRICTS

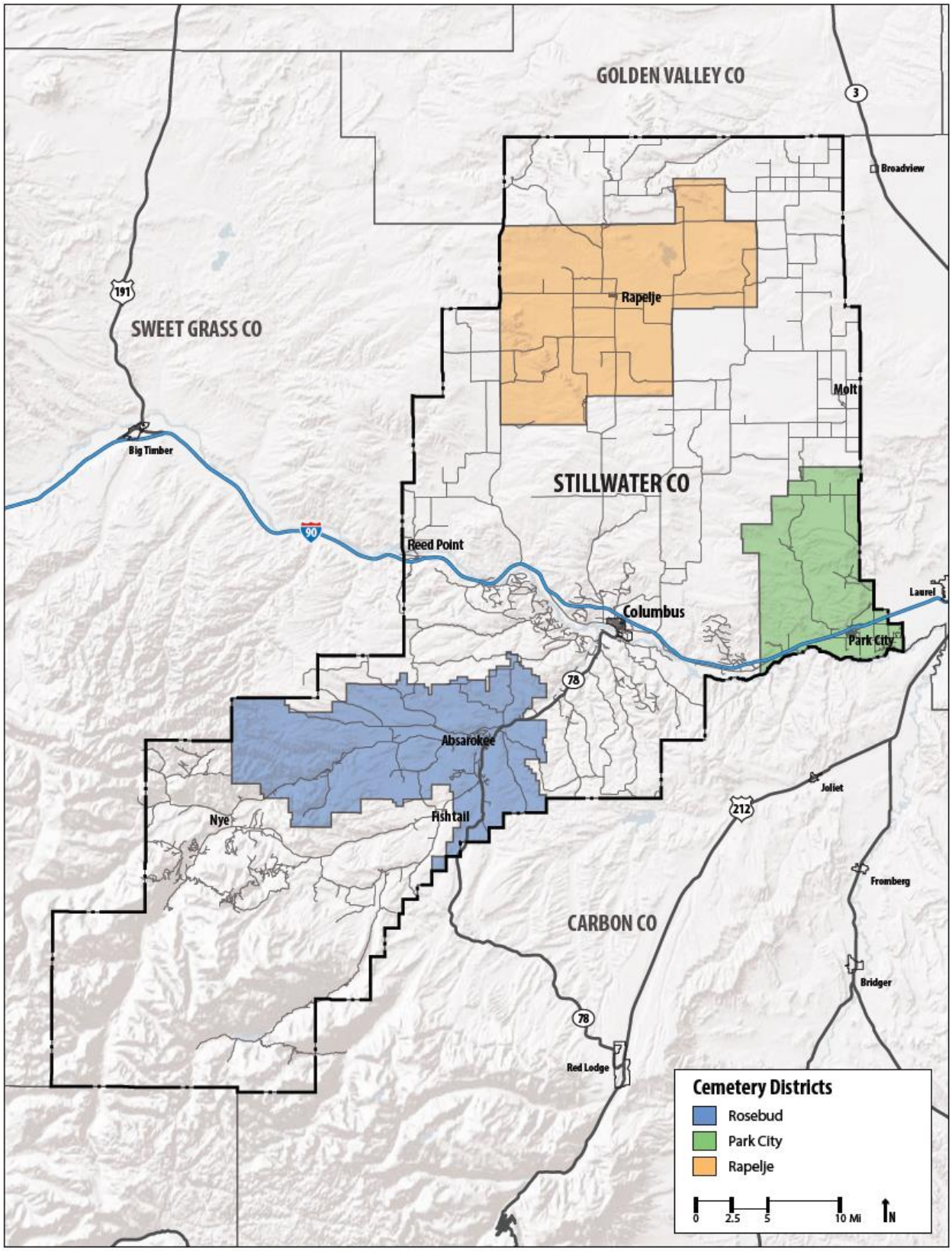
There are three cemetery districts in Stillwater County; Park City, Rapelje and Rosebud. However, most communities in Stillwater County manage and maintain a local cemetery. Mountain View Cemetery is maintained by the Town of Columbus and is located within the city-county planning jurisdiction at the intersection of Hwy 10 and Rapelje Rd. (Hwy 306).

The Rosebud Cemetery District owns three acres south of Absarokee near the intersection of Hwy 78 and Hwy 419. The Nye Cemetery located on Nye Cemetery Road southeast of Nye, is affiliated with the Rosebud Cemetery District.

The Park City Cemetery District owns two sites, one site southwest of Park City and the old Pioneer cemetery, north of Park City.

The Reed Point Cemetery is located west of the county line in Sweet Grass County, south of Interstate 90.

The Rapelje Cemetery is located on Hwy 306 south of town, and is managed informally by members of the Rapelje community.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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Broadview
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SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
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Reed Point
Laurel
Columbus
Park City
78
Absarokee
Joliet
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4.6 PUBLIC FACILITIES

INTERSTATE SYSTEM

Interstate 90 is the main east-west route through Stillwater County. This four lane divided highway was completed in 1973 and is maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation. The towns of Columbus, Park City and Reed Point are located along I-90. Each of these communities is served by an interchange. There is another interchange at Springtime, 8 miles west of Columbus, and a Ranch access between Springtime and Reed Point. Average daily traffic on Interstate 90 ranges from about 10,000 near Reed Point to over 15,000 near Park City. Over 20% of the traffic is commercial truck traffic.

STATE HIGHWAYS

Highway 78, between Columbus and Red Lodge, is a primary highway maintained by Montana Department of Transportation. This is a paved two lane road which serves as the arterial north-south route in southern Stillwater County. This highway also serves as the main street for the Absarokee business district. This route was designated the Donald Ruhl Memorial Highway in 1995 and went through major reconstruction beginning in 2004. Average daily traffic on Highway 78 ranges from under 800 south of Absarokee to nearly 5,000 near Columbus. Approximately 5% of the traffic is commercial truck traffic.

Highway No. 10 is also an east-west route between Park City and the Springtime Interchange. This highway now serves as a frontage road to I-90 and a minor collector to central Stillwater County. Highway 10 is maintained by the Montana Department of Transportation. This route parallels the Yellowstone River and is a two lane paved road.

Highway 302, east of Molt, is a major collector maintained by the State. This is a paved two lane road, 1.4 miles long and 24 feet wide, which serves Molt and northern Stillwater County.

Highway 306, between Columbus and Rapelje, is maintained by the State. This is a 23.3 mile long, paved 25 feet wide, two lane road. Highway 306 serves as a school bus route and major north-south collector for northern Stillwater County. Average daily traffic on Highway 306 ranges from approximately 1,500 near Columbus to about 200 at Rapelje.

Highway 419, between the junction with Highway 78 south of Absarokee and Nye is one of two east-west major collectors in southern Stillwater County which accesses the mining region. This section of highway extends beyond the Stillwater Mine to Woodbine Campground and is 22-28 feet wide and approximately 28 miles long. This is a paved two lane road which also serves as the main street for Fishtail, Dean and Nye. Average daily traffic on Highway 419 is near 1,300 at the junction with Highway 78 and nearly 500 at Nye.

Highway 420 is the other east-west major collector in southern Stillwater County. The first seven miles of this route west of Absarokee are paved, two lane and maintained by the State. The remaining twelve miles have a gravel surface. This route is becoming increasingly important as access to the mining region in southern Stillwater County. Average daily traffic on Highway 420

at the junction with Highway 78 is about 400 vehicles. There was a major rockslide on the gravel portion of the road in 2015 which forced closure of part of the road. Major stabilization work was completed and the road reopened in August 2017.

Highway 421, between Columbus and Joliet, is a major collector in east-central Stillwater County. This highway is a paved two lane road maintained by the State. Average daily traffic on Highway 421 ranges from about 1000 south of Columbus to approximately 700 leaving Stillwater County and entering Carbon County.

COUNTY ROADS - Major Collectors

Two major collectors are maintained by Stillwater County. Major collectors are the more important intra-county travel corridors which serve county seats and larger towns not directly served by arterials.

The Molt-Rapelje Road is a major collector and a bus route. There are five distinct sections to this route. Total length is approximately 23 miles long. A three mile section just east of Rapelje is paved, the rest of the road has a gravel surface and an average width of approximately 24 feet.

Big Timber Road west of Rapelje is also a major collector and bus route. This road connects Rapelje with Big Timber in Sweet Grass County. The section of this road within Stillwater County is 8.15 miles long, 18 to 22 feet wide and has a gravel surface.

The Columbus - Molt Road is also a graveled minor collector and bus route, connecting Columbus to Molt and providing access from the central portion of the County to the northeast.

Springtime - Svenson - Trees Roads form another major collector serving the Reed Point area. This section of road is 20 miles long, varies in width from 19 to 21 feet, has a gravel surface and is a bus route.

Countryman Creek Road is a bus route connecting to Hwy 78 south of Columbus. This road has a gravel surface, is 11.73 miles long and widths varying from 19 to 25 feet. The remainder of the Countryman Creek Road is designated a local road.

Shane Creek Road is also a bus route connecting to Hwy. 78 south of Columbus. The section of this road classified as a major collector is 5.5 miles long of which 4 miles are paved and the rest has a gravel surface with widths varying from 16 to 24 feet.

Whitebird Creek Road is a bus route connecting to Hwy. 78, which has 2 miles of paved surface and 7.3 miles of gravel surface, the widths varying from 13 to 29 feet.

West Rosebud Road intersects Hwy 419 southwest of Fishtail and serves the Mystic Lake area. This road is 20.5 miles long, of which the first six miles are paved and are part of a bus route. Pavement width is 25-26 feet. The remaining 14.21 miles of this road has a gravel surface and is only 19 feet wide. This route provides access to the Custer National Forest.

COUNTY ROADS - Minor Collectors

Minor collectors receive accumulative traffic from local roads, provide service to smaller communities and link locally important traffic generators with the rural areas. Eleven county roads are classified as minor collectors.

The Big Coulee Road is north of the Rapelje Road and is classified as a minor collector. This is a dirt road with some gravel on the driving surface, 20 feet wide by 13.3 miles long.

Gooseneck - Arnold - Hoagland - Downer Roads form a minor collector connecting Broadview with the –Molt-Rapelje Road. This section of road is almost 19 miles long, varies from 20 to 24 feet wide and has a gravel surface. Portions of these roads are bus routes.

Battle Butte - Peterson Roads form an east/west minor collector connecting the Rapelje Road to Molt. This section of road is over 16 miles long, varies in width from 18 to 24 feet and has a gravel surface. Portions of these roads are bus routes.

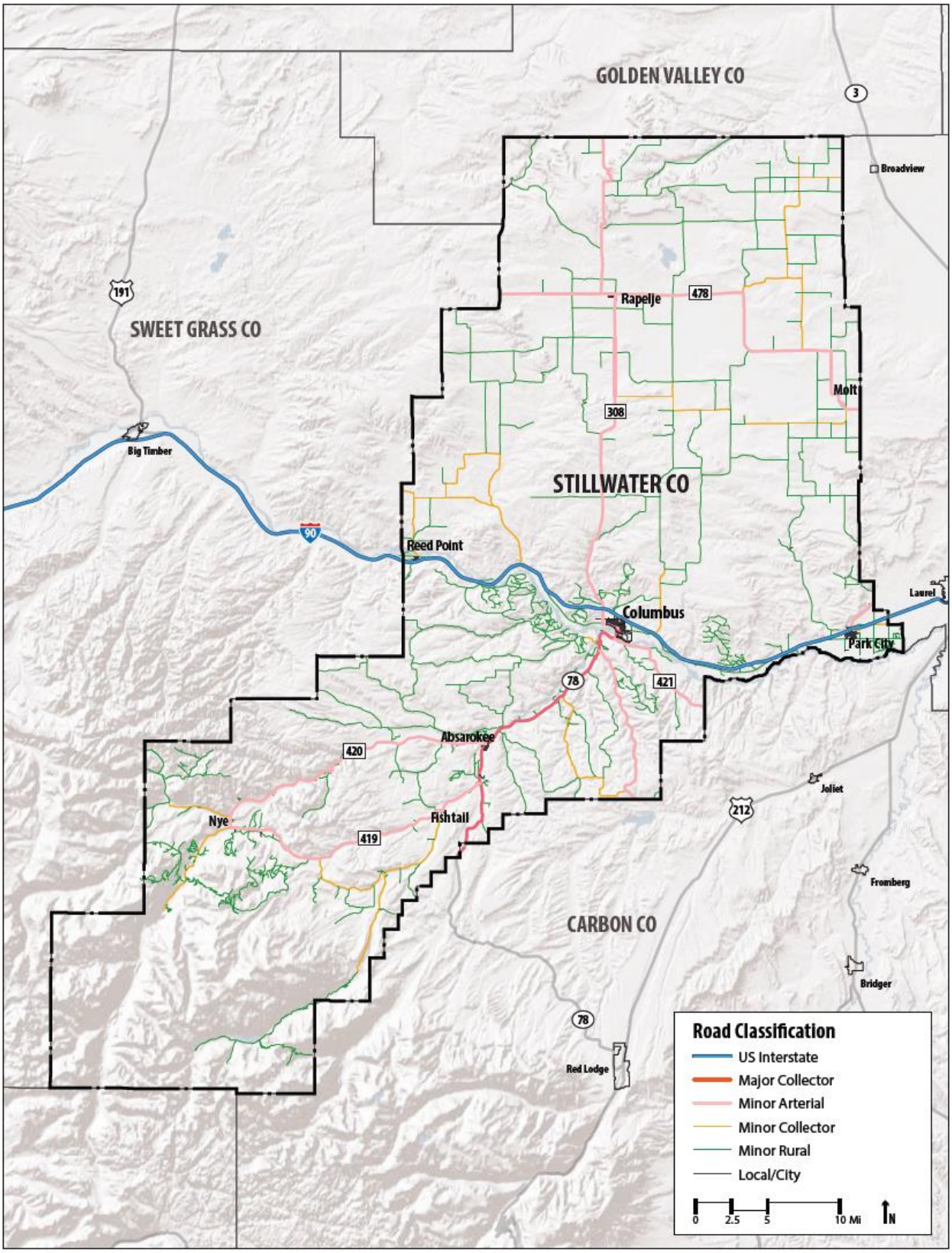
Fiddler Creek Road is also a minor collector connecting the West Rosebud Road with the Nye Road. This section of road is 6.84 miles long, 21 feet wide, has a gravel surface and is part of a bus route.

West Fork Road is 4.66 miles long, 20 feet wide, has a graveled surface and is access to the Custer National Forest.

The last 3.32 miles of the Nye Road is also a minor collector. This road is paved, over 24 feet wide and is a main access to the Custer National Forest and Absaroka- Beartooth Wilderness.

OTHER COUNTY ROADS - Local Roads

There are over one hundred other county roads classified as local roads. There are over 500 miles of local roads which are included in the total of about 800 miles of road maintained by Stillwater County. Approximately 220 miles of local roads are located in the northern part of the county; 100 miles of local roads are in the south end of the county, another 90 miles in the Columbus area, 70 miles around Reed Point and over 50 miles in the Park City area. Most of the local roads are less than the 24 ft. wide standard and have a gravel surface.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CARBON CO
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TOWN STREETS

The unincorporated towns of Absarokee, Fishtail, Molt, Nye, Rapelje, Reed Point, and Park City have streets which are the county's maintenance responsibility. Absarokee has over five miles of streets, all paved. Fishtail has .5 mile of streets, of which .2 mile is paved, .1 mile has a gravel surface, and .2 mile is undeveloped. Nye is not a platted town site and the only public road through town is the Nye Road, which is paved. Molt has about 1 mile of streets, of which .1 mile is paved, while .6 mile have a gravel surface, and the rest are undeveloped. Rapelje has over three miles of streets with over a mile paved, about two miles gravel surface and the remainder are undeveloped. Reed Point has over two miles of paved streets plus undeveloped streets. Park City has over seven miles of streets, all are paved. An additional 19 streets were platted, but remain undeveloped. Each town site has additional miles of alleys.

There are also sidewalks in Absarokee, Fishtail, Rapelje, Reed Point, Park City and a short section in Molt. Sidewalks were primarily built to serve businesses, schools, post offices and other public buildings. Sidewalks are not continuous in the residential areas of these unincorporated towns.

BRIDGES

There are over 30 major bridge structures in the county. The State of Montana maintains the bridge structures on Interstate 90, Highway 10, Rapelje Road 306, Nye Road 419, Stillwater River Road 420 and Joliet Road 421. The Stillwater County Road & Bridge Department is responsible for maintaining bridges on county roads. Over 40 structures are maintained by the county. A few of these have clear span of 20 feet or less. A bridge levy is assessed against property in the county for this purpose. The County also participates in the state off system bridge replacement program and is active in applying for state grant funds for bridge replacement.

The state bridge inspection program includes a list of the major structures, water features crossed, location, type of structure, length, year built and sufficiency rating. The sufficiency rating is indicative of bridge sufficiency to remain in service. A rating of 100 % represents an entirely sufficient bridge and 0% represents an entirely deficient bridge. A rating of 0 to 50% qualifies for replacement and a rating of 50 to 80% qualifies for rehabilitation through Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation Program funding.

Stillwater County has a proactive bridge improvement program and a long term commitment to capital improvement planning. Bridge standards were formally adopted in 2002 to address bridge demolition and rehabilitation, hydrology, bridge and large culvert design. Many of the smaller wooden bridges are being replaced with culverts.

ROAD AND BRIDGE OPERATIONS PLAN

Stillwater County Road Department began an inspection and rating program for all county roads in 2002. The County inspects on a two year cycle. The pavement surface evaluation and rating (PACER) program determines the condition of all roads under the County's jurisdiction. A three

year Operations Plan is utilized to manage the Stillwater County Road & Bridge Department. Primary sources of funding include property tax levies, gas tax, and other non tax revenues.

RIGHT OF WAY RECORDS

The right-of-way records on Stillwater County Roads are a mixture of officially declared county roads with documented right-of-way, deeded property, recorded easements and dedicated rights-of-way on subdivision plats. Some county roads are by prescriptive right only based on historical usage. There are other situations where right-of-way records exist for roads which were never built and have no documented historical usage or where physical road locations do not match surveyed rights-of-way.

FOREST SERVICE ROADS AND TRAILS

There are over 63 miles of forest roads on National Forest Lands within Stillwater County. The forest road system includes Horseman Flat Road 846, Lodgepole Road 2142, Bad Canyon Road 2491, Benbow Road 1414, West Rosebud Road 2072 and Picket Pin Road 2140.

In addition, there are over 50 miles of trails on National Forest Lands within Stillwater County. The trail system includes Stillwater Trail 24, Mystic Lake Trail 19, Phantom Trail 17, Lodgepole Trail 22, Meyers Creek Trail 27, Fishtail Trail 37, Stillwater Plateau Trail 51, Bad Canyon Trail 94, Rabbit Gulch Trail 20 and a portion of Beartrap Trail 95.

AIRPORT FACILITIES

A Columbus Airport Master Plan was completed in 1996, a new runway was constructed in 1997-1998, and an additional taxiway was constructed in 2002. The Columbus airport is classified as a secondary facility. There is one 3,800 foot long runway which is 75 feet wide and is paved. This facility is jointly owned by Stillwater County and the Town of Columbus, and is managed by the jointly-appointed Columbus Airport Board. The facility is a general-aviation airport that is lighted and equipped for takeoffs and landings at all times and under all weather conditions. There is no air traffic control facility, but pilots are in radio contact with Montana Flight Control in Great Falls. Fuel is available at the airport, and there is a mechanic on site. Space is leased for private hangars at the airport.

WATER SYSTEMS

Absarokee and Rapelje presently have central water systems. About 1200 people are being served by these Community Water Systems. The remaining people in the planning jurisdictional area are served by individual water systems such as wells, springs or cisterns.

Absarokee Water User's Association was a cooperative in which each property owner owned shares. Water supply and treatment has been provided since 1954. A Water and Sewer District was created in 1995 which now provides water service.

The Rapelje Water System uses a spring, pump, and 8,000 gallon cistern to supply the unincorporated community of Rapelje. The cistern was originally constructed by the railroad in 1917. The water in the Rapelje area is very hard primarily due to the presence of calcium carbonates.
About 60 % of the total county population is not on public water systems. Their water supply is obtained primarily from ground water sources. Adequate supplies of ground water have been obtained from the alluvial deposits along the river valley of the Rosebud, Stillwater, and Yellowstone rivers in the southern half of Stillwater County. The depth and flow volume in these wells vary significantly.

SEWER SYSTEMS

Absarokee, Park City and Reed Point currently have public sewer systems. Over 2000 people or about 25 % of the County's population are being served by these community sewer systems. The remaining people are served by individual septic systems.

The Absarokee sewer system is owned by Stillwater County through two rural special improvement districts (RSID #5 and #7). The existing system is an aerated 3 cell lagoon system of 6.46 acres. Secondary treatment is also provided at this facility through an ultra-violent light system and seven aerators. An auger monster was installed in 2008 to take the rags out before entering the lagoon. This treatment system was upgraded in 1986-1988 and is designed to serve a population of up to 1253 people. The sewage collection system was constructed in 1954 with additions in 1964 and major improvements in 1978. The Absarokee wastewater treatment plant was expanded in 1989 to ultimately provide sewer treatment capacity of 864,000 gallons per day. In 2013, 1185 linear feet of clay sewer main lines were replaced with PVC on Willow Street in the Riverside Addition. Asbestos cement, clay tile and PVC pipe are all found in the collection system. In 2017, a manhole on Weast Street was replaced due to several cracks causing infiltration into the system. The primary need at this time is to upgrade the existing lagoon to meet DEQ’s limit requirements for discharge into the fresh water stream (Rosebud Creek) and continue to replace the old main lines as needed. A PER (preliminary engineering report) was completed in 2018 and construction will be completed by 2020.

The initial Park City sewage collection and treatment system was constructed in 1968. The system provides service for all areas of town with a network of 8 inch sewer mains with one lift station. The collection system in Park City also contains a variety of pipe including clay and pvc. The Park City sewer treatment plant was most recently expanded in 2002 to increase its capacity to 600,000 gallons per day, which would provide sewer treatment for approximately 1,000 people. It is a tertiary treatment system that ultimately discharges into the Yellowstone River. It is operated by the Park City Water and Sewer District.

The Reed Point Water and Sewer District was formed in late 1992. The district constructed a sewer system in 1995 with federal and state grants and loans to treat up to 13,000 gallons per day, which would provide sewer treatment for approximately 130 people. Sewer facilities include 8 inch, gravity flow collection system of pvc pipe, which flows into a dual pump lift station. Effluent is pumped to a two cell facultative treatment pond equipped with aerators. The two lagoon cells are three acres in size, poly lined, and non-discharging. Treated effluent is discharged by center pivot spray irrigation on an adjacent hay field. The hay field is privately

owned, but the district has an 18 acre irrigation easement. It is operated by the Reed Point Water and Sewer District. The district has recently discussed the steps necessary to expand this system to increase its capacity.

SOLID WASTE

Stillwater County formed a refuse disposal district in 1975. The district is governed by an appointed board of directors. The membership of this board is county-wide with members being from Absarokee, Nye, Park City, Reed Point, Molt, Rapelje and Columbus rural. Members are appointed to three year terms by the Board of County Commissioners. The district changed from 64 unattended collection sites throughout the county to a transfer station near Columbus and seven attended sites located south of Absarokee, north of Nye, west of Park City, west of Reed Point, and east of Rapelje, plus two unattended sites in the Molt and Broadview areas. The following map shows the location of these sites.

The district operates a collection system which utilizes 28 and 40 yard roll-off boxes which are picked up by the district's three hook frame assembly trucks. Uncompacted boxes from the unstaffed locations are transported to the transfer station for compacting ; all compacted waste is hauled to the Billings Regional Landfill. This landfill is operated by the City of Billings and the district pays tipping fees at the landfill per ton of compacted waste. Approximately 5,000 tons are transported to Billings annually.

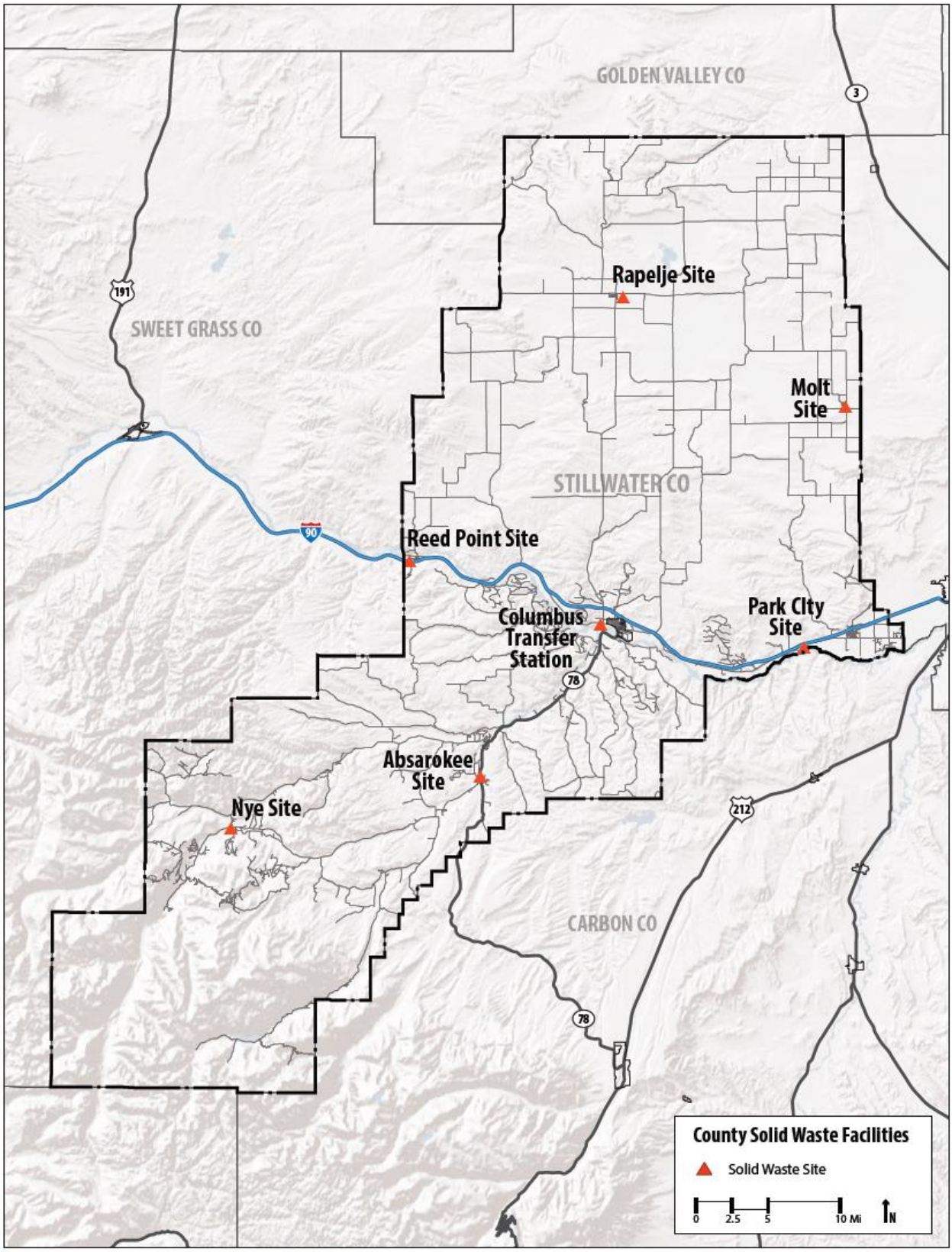
The Solid Waste Department recycles cardboard, metal, aluminum, magazines and newspaper at the Transfer Station, Absarokee, Nye, and Reed Point. Molt, Park City and Rapelje recycle cardboard and metal. The Transfer Station, Park City, Nye and Reed Point recycle used motor oil.

All staffed sites, with the exception of Rapelje, have stationary compactors with Absarokee and Park City having two stationary compactors.

The Department charges for some items such as commercial yard debris/tree trimming, barrels, tires, agriculture waste, animal carcasses, construction and demolition debris, roofing debris, and out-of-district garbage.

The district employs a full-time Solid Waste Supervisor, one full-time driver, one part-time driver, one full-time secretary, eight part-time site attendants and three roving site attendants.

The Stillwater County Solid Waste District is a countywide district established in 1975 to eliminate the need for county landfills, as well as to facilitate the prohibition of private trash burning in the county. A solid waste assessment charged per year per household funds the Solid Waste District. There is no charge to county residents that live outside the Town of Columbus, for disposing of household trash at the collection points or transfer station. People from outside of the Stillwater Solid Waste District may join the district for $175.00 per year. Roll-off boxes are available for rent to County residents living outside of Columbus.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Rapelje Site
Molt Site
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Reed Point Site
Columbus Transfer Station
Park City Site
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Absarokee Site
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CARBON CO
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County Solid Waste Facilities
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SCHOOL FACILITIES

Each school district owns property for the school grounds, athletic fields, bus garages, teacher's residences or other school purposes. The Absarokee Districts own almost 17 acres at three locations for the high school, elementary school and an athletic field. The new high school/middle school was built in 1989. The average enrollment is around 85 high school students and 40 middle school students. The elementary school was built in 1938 and remodeled in 1954. This building is currently used for grades K through 6th. Average enrollment is around 120 students. The old cobblestone school was built around 1910 and is currently used as a community center.

The Fishtail School District #13 owns one acre for the elementary school site with an enrollment typically less than 10 students. Molt School District #12 owns one site for the school which is over two acres in size for grades K through 8th with an enrollment of around five students. Nye School District #31 owns approximately six acres for the elementary school site for grades K through 8th with an enrollment usually less than 10 students.

Park City School District #5 owns about 10 acres on several properties used for the school building, parking lot, athletic field, shop, library, bus garages, a park and other school purposes. Park City elementary enrollment averages about 180 students, 7th to 8th grades about 50 students and high school about 95 students. Rapelje School District #32 owns about nine acres in total for the school grounds, athletic field and several teacher residences. Rapelje elementary enrollment averages about 30 students, 7th to 8th grades less than 10 students and high school about 20 students. Reed Point School District #9 owns over five acres at two locations for the high school, and elementary school. Reed Point elementary enrollment averages about 40 students, 7th to 8th grades about 15 students and high school about 25 students.

The Columbus schools are located in the Town of Columbus. The elementary school site consists of approximately 2 acres. About 50% of the grounds are occupied by buildings which include twelve classrooms constructed in 1970, and a gymnasium and 3 class rooms constructed in 1989. The remaining grounds are used for recess and play consisting of 6 basketball goals located on a 5000 sq. ft. concrete playing surface, a sand surface open play area, and various pieces of playground equipment.

The Columbus High School/Middle School facilities comprise approximately 13.3 acres. Five acres of the grounds are occupied by buildings and parking area. A major renovation was completed in 1999-2000, including a new gym, middle school and additional classrooms, complimenting various other expansion projects in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1980s.

The remaining 8 acres of the high school grounds are occupied by a lighted football field, running track, and bus parking.

PARKS AND RECREATION

There are a variety of recreational opportunities in Stillwater County (see map on page 4-38). The Custer National Forest includes land in southern Stillwater County which offers recreational

opportunities ranging from primitive to motorized. Primitive recreational opportunities are available in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area. There are two major wilderness portals in Stillwater County, the West Rosebud trail and Main Stillwater trail. Over 10,000 visitors have been counted in one year at these portals. There are three developed Forest Service campgrounds within Stillwater County including Woodbine, Emerald Lake and Pine Grove Campgrounds. These campgrounds have a combined capacity of 122 units which are accessible by car. A variety of dispersed recreational opportunities are available on the Custer National Forest including hunting, hiking, fishing, backpacking, cross-country skiing, mountain climbing, horseback riding, and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

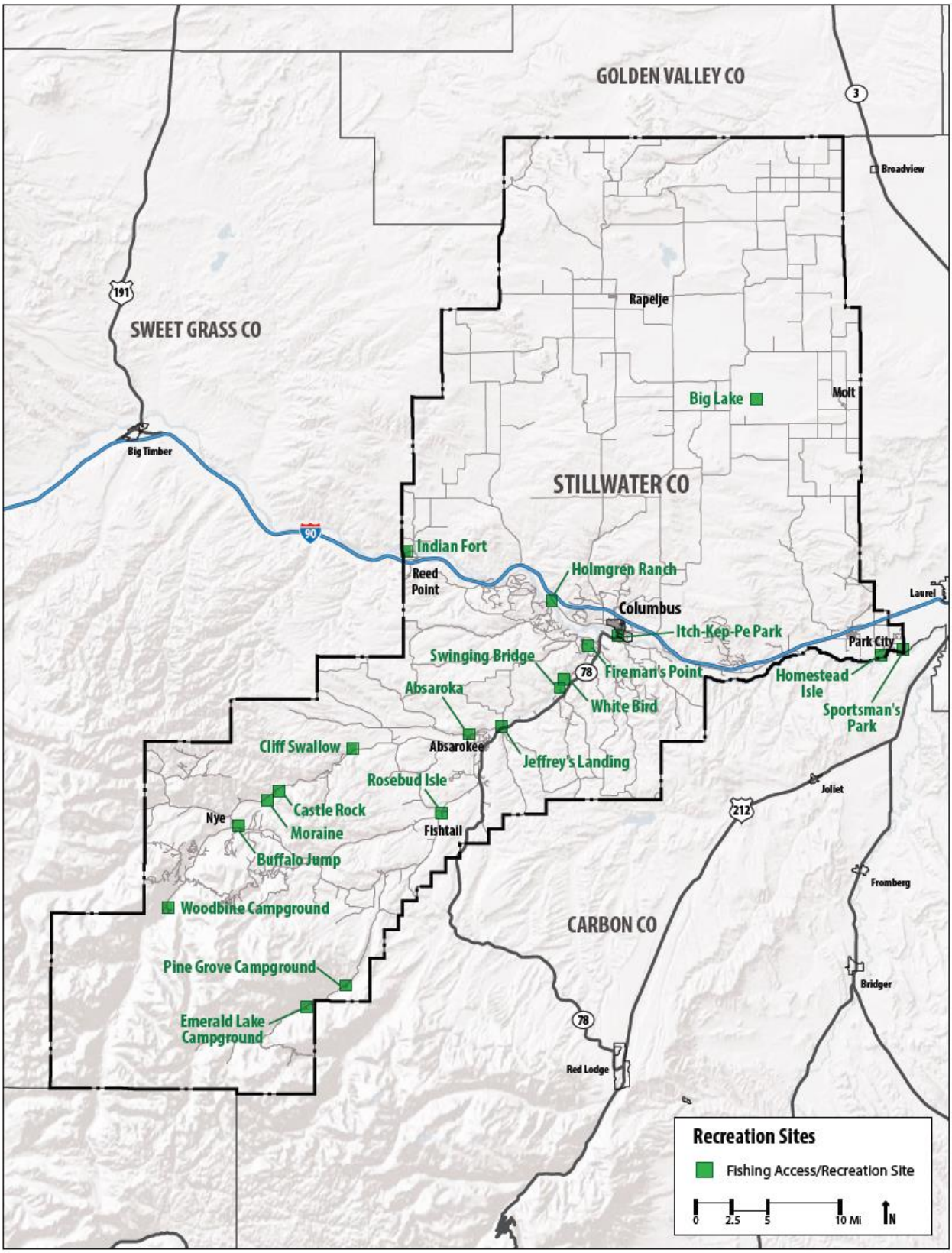
In addition to national forest lands in Stillwater County, there are several tracts of Bureau of Land Management land, State owned property scattered through the county and two National Wildlife refuges in northern Stillwater County. Grass Lake and Hailstone national wildlife refuges are managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Service. Hunting and fishing activities are managed by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks within the county. Fishing access sites include Indian Fort north of Reed Point, Holmgren west of Columbus, Buffalo Mirage (Sportsman Park) southeast of Park City on the Yellowstone River; Fireman's Point, Swinging Bridge, White Bird, Jeffrey's Landing, Absaroka, Cliff Swallow, Castle Rock, Moraine, and Buffalo Jump on the Stillwater River; and Rosebud Isle on West Rosebud Creek near Fishtail.

Additional recreational opportunities are available in local community parks. Absarokee has three community parks. Hawkins Park is located on Willow Street, two blocks from State Highway 78. This park is less than 1.4 acres in size and contains two tennis courts, picnic facilities, skateboard area and access to Rosebud Creek. Absarokee Pool site is 1.23 acres in size located off Grove Street and has a swimming pool (reconstructed in 1986), two horseshoe courts and picnic facilities. Maintenance is provided by the Beartooth Park District. The Absarokee ball field consists of 5.0 acres gifted to the County in 1986 and 2001. Located one mile west of Absarokee, it is presently operated and maintained by the Absarokee Little League baseball club. On-site improvements include a ball field, backstop, and bleachers. There is also a 21.5 acre private park west of Absarokee in the Circle T Subdivision.

Community parks are also located in the unincorporated communities of Fishtail, Reed Point, and Rapelje. The site of the Fishtail Family Fun Park was acquired by the Fishtail Community Center in the 1990s, and has been improved and landscaped using grant monies and local contributions. Park City has a 1.4 acre park located north of the interstate exit with large shade trees and picnic tables. The platted Town of Rapelje has a total of 8.3 acres of parkland in five dedicated parks in town but only one has been developed with a picnic shelter and horseshoe court. The Reed Point Park was purchased by the Reed Point Community Club with donated funds and money raised by the annual Sheep Drive.

The County also has a park fund containing cash-in-lieu of parkland funds paid when a new subdivision plat is approved. The funds are allocated for park improvements in the communities near the location of a new subdivision. Money from this fund has gone to the Beartooth Park District, Granite Peak Park in Columbus, and funded new playground equipment at the Park City School.

The Beartooth Park District in southern Stillwater County was created by public election and a board of directors appointed. The park sites in Absarokee are maintained by the district. Future funding for the maintenance and repair of the Absarokee swimming pool was a major concern leading to the formation of the Park District.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Big Lake
Molt
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
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Indian Fort
Reed Point
Holmgren Ranch
Columbus
Itch-Kep-Pe Park
Laurel
Park City
Swinging Bridge
78
Fireman's Point
Homestead Isle
Absaroka
White Bird
Sportsman's Park
Cliff Swallow
Absarokee
Jeffrey's Landing
Rosebud Isle
Joliet
Castle Rock
212
Nye
Moraine
Fishtail
Buffalo Jump
Fromberg
Woodbine Campground
CARBON CO
Pine Grove Campground
Bridger
Emerald Lake Campground
78
Red Lodge
Recreation Sites
Fishing Access/Recreation Site
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4.7 NATURAL RESOURCES

CLIMATE

Stillwater County is located in a climatic region described as semiarid, which is characterized by colder temperatures. The general weather of the area consists of cold, dry winters; cool, moist springs; hot, moderately dry summers; and cool, dry autumns.

The climatic data summary provides mean monthly precipitation and temperature data. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 12-14 inches in the Yellowstone River valley and northern Stillwater County, 14-20 inches in the Stillwater River valley and foothills, and 20 to >70 inches in the Beartooth Mountains. Nearly all precipitation in the winter is snowfall. Snowfall is estimated to reach accumulated totals over two hundred inches in the mountains and less than 30 inches in the lower elevations. The runoff from melting mountain snowpack during the spring and early summer combined with heavy rains causes occasional flooding of some streams and rivers.

Stillwater County is located in a belt of westerly winds. The mountains of the Pacific Northwest and the Rockies receive most of the moisture before it reaches here. This predominately westerly flow changes in the spring months. This allows for intrusions of moist air from the Gulf of Mexico brought in by an easterly flow. April, May and June precipitation accounts for nearly 50% of the annual average. The information available on humidity for this area indicates mid day relative humidity averages around 30% in summer and over 50% in winter. Winds are predominately from the west. Available wind information indicates mean wind speed is around 10 mph. However, wind gusts in excess of 60 mph occur. Severe storms are not common; however, thunderstorms, hailstorms, high winds, heavy snow, freezing rain and sleet do occur.

Average monthly temperatures in Stillwater County range from over 60 degrees F in the summer to around 20 degrees F in the winter. Daily temperatures can vary substantially, summer high temperatures can exceed 100 degrees F while arctic air in winter can lower temperatures below -30 degrees F. Temperature can also change very rapidly; "Chinook" winds can raise winter temperatures 40 to 50 degrees within a day. Elevation and aspect also play a role in temperature patterns. The number of frost free days ranges from less than 50 days in the mountains to over 130 days in the Yellowstone River valley.

The air quality in Stillwater County is considered to be excellent. The County is designated a Class II air shed for purposes of determining available ambient air quality increments. There are no known violations of Ambient Air Quality Standards in Stillwater County at this time.

GEOLOGY

The geology of Stillwater County includes rock units that are as old as 2.7 billion years and as recent as present-day. Within this geologic time span, many layers of sedimentary and volcanic rocks were deposited and bodies of igneous rocks were placed. The dynamic earth pressures that shift continents and build mountains brought deeply buried rocks to the surface, exposing them

to weathering and erosion. What is evident today in Stillwater County are the remnants of many cycles of emplacement or deposition and erosion.

The ages of the rocks generally progress from the oldest, in the southern part of the county, to most-recent, in the northern part and along stream valleys. In the vicinity of the Beartooth Mountains, flat-lying, younger Paleozoic and Mesozoic sediments that once covered the entire region were thrust upward during the end of the Mesozoic era. This uplift exposed the oldest Precambrian rocks at the core of the mountains and resulted in the deposition of Late Cretaceous and Tertiary sediments along the north and east flanks. At this time, volcanic lava and ash flows erupted along the mountain front as well. During and after mountain building, stream action carved channels through the younger strata and deposited sand, silt, and gravel in the valley bottoms. Glaciers covered the Beartooth Range until recently. Glacial action helped sculpt the present-day landscape by scouring the highlands and depositing the sediment along the mountain front. The youngest deposits present are accumulating in active stream channels like the Stillwater and Yellowstone Rivers.

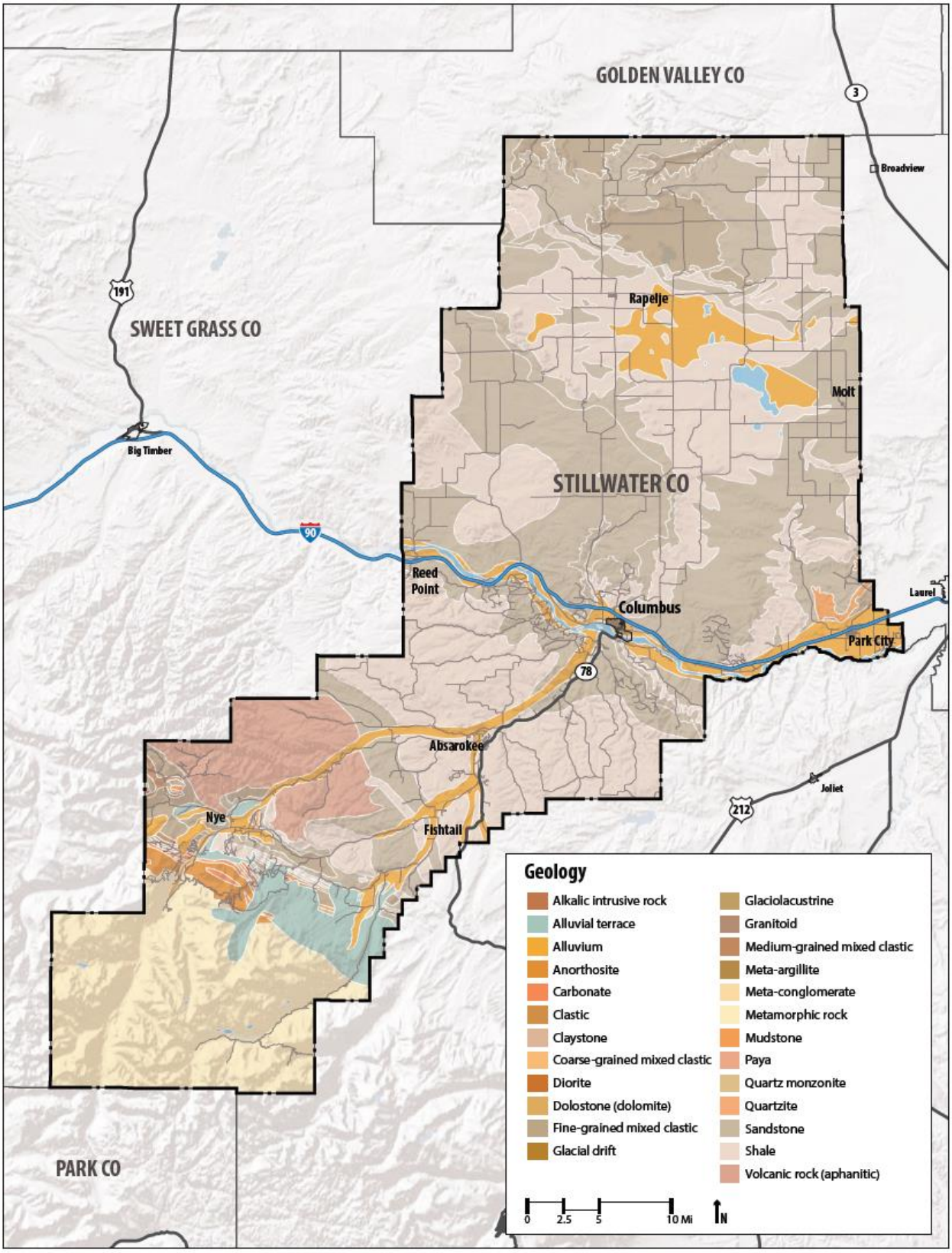
The geologic units present in Stillwater County can be divided into six age groups. From youngest to oldest they include; 1) Quaternary valley fill and glacial sediments, 2) Tertiary sediments and volcanic intrusive, 3) Cretaceous sediments and volcanic extrusive, 4) Triassic/Jurassic undifferentiated sediments, 5) Paleozoic undifferentiated sediments, and 6) Precambrian intrusive and metamorphic rocks. These age groups are further subdivided into distinct units that are shown on the accompanying geologic map.

The Quaternary sediments (Qal) are predominately unconsolidated clay, sand, silt, and gravel deposited by stream action (alluvial) or glaciation. Glacial deposits are found on the surface of high terraces flanking the Beartooth Mountains and in mountain valleys. Alluvial deposits are present in all major river valleys and lake basins.

Underlying a thin veneer of glacial out-wash are thick deposits of stratified silt, sand, and gravel (QTt) that comprise the high terraces of the Beartooth foothills. These sediments were derived from the Beartooth Mountains and accumulated during the late Tertiary period. The Fort Union formation (Tfu), composed of inter-bedded shale and sandstone units, was deposited during the early Tertiary and contains a few lignitic coal beds. The sediments often form cliffs and steep bluffs along Rosebud Creek and the Stillwater River between Nye and Columbus.

Small intrusive (Ti) of felsic and intermediate composition outcrop near Limestone in the southern part of the county. These intrusive do not appear related to the thick deposits of volcanic extrusive located north of Limestone. These tuffs and tufaceous sandstones were determined to be upper Cretaceous in age (Kv).

The Hell Creek formation (Khc) is also mapped as upper Cretaceous and occurs throughout the county. The formation is recognized by alternating beds of greenish gray siltstone and gray-brown sandstone. It may locally contain limestone beds and ironstone concretions. Sandstone outcrops along the Yellowstone River between Reed Point and Columbus belong to the Hell Creek formation.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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STILLWATER CO
PARK CO
Broadview
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
Absarokee
Nye
Fishtail
Joliet
191
90
78
212
3
Geology
Alkalic intrusive rock
Alluvial terrace
Alluvium
Anorthosite
Carbonate
Clastic
Claystone
Coarse-grained mixed clastic
Diorite
Dolostone (dolomite)
Fine-grained mixed clastic
Glacial drift
Glaciolacustrine
Granitoid
Medium-grained mixed clastic
Meta-argillite
Meta-conglomerate
Metamorphic rock
Mudstone
Paya
Quartz monzonite
Quartzite
Sandstone
Shale
Volcanic rock (aphanitic)
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Other units deposited during the upper Cretaceous include the Bearpaw shale, Judith River formation, Claggett formation, Eagle sandstone, and Telegraph Creek formation. These units are collectively called the Montana Group (Km) and outcrop mostly in the north part of the county. The dominant rock types are shale and sandstone. Many units contain bentonite and lignitic coal beds. The sandstone beds are usually massive and often form high cliffs and bluffs. The Eagle sandstone that outcrops in the north and south part of the county is usually associated with the cliffs and rimrocks of the Billings area.

The lower Cretaceous period is represented by the Colorado Group (Kc) which is comprised of the Mowry and Thermopolis shale formations and the Cloverly sandstone. The shale formations outcrop in a small area near Nye and are predominately shale with inter-bedded siltstone and fine-grained sandstone. Bentonite beds are common and shale members are known to contain fish scales, bones, and teeth. The sandstone member of the Cloverly formation is a known oil and gas bearing unit.

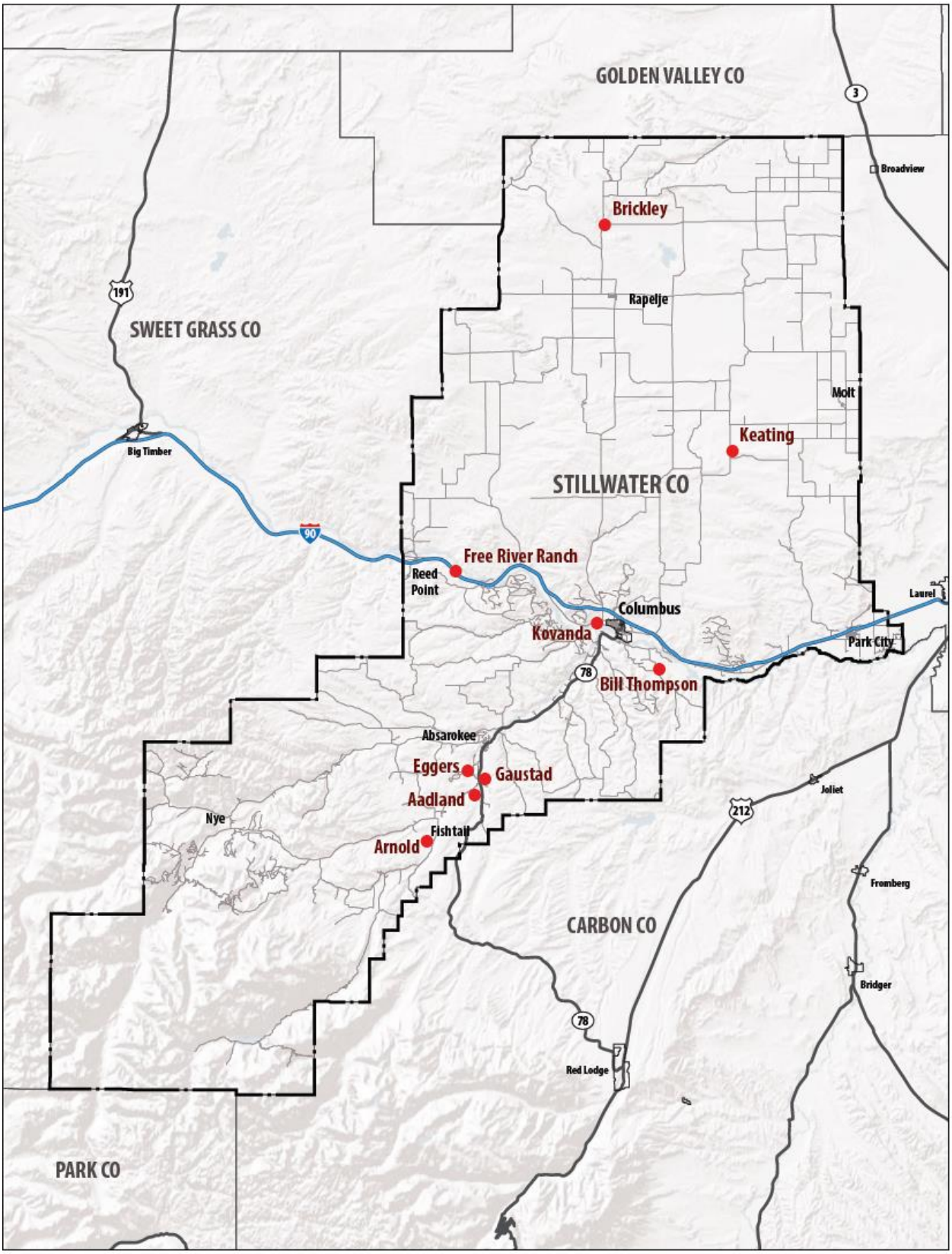
The undifferentiated sediments of the Jurassic-Triassic (JTr) periods overlie the Paleozoic sediments (Pal). This sequence of strata was rotated vertically during the uplift of the Beartooth range and is well exposed on the north flanks of the mountains. The Mesozoic strata are composed of inter-bedded medium-grained sandstone and shale. Some units are red sandstone and shales, typical of this period. The Paleozoic sediments present in this area include the Phosphoric formation, Quadrant sandstone, Amsden formation, Madison limestone, Three Forks shale, Jefferson limestone and Bighorn dolomite. The community of Limestone was named for a nearby bluff composed of thick, white to light gray Madison limestone. The Cambrian age formations have not been mapped as distinct units. The Paleozoic sediments overlie the Stillwater Complex to the south.

The Stillwater Complex (pCsc) is a Late Archean, mafic to ultra mafic, layered intrusion situated on the north edge of the Beartooth Mountains. The complex was tilted and subsequently exposed during the uplift of the Beartooth Mountains during the late Cretaceous. Layering of the complex was due to the growth and precipitation of minerals in ferromagnesian-rich magma. The accumulation of certain minerals forms the basis for identifiable map units within the complex. In cross-section, the complex is approximately 3.3 miles thick and extends over a strike distance of 28 miles. The basal unit of the complex is in contact with older metasedimentary rocks that comprise the core of the Beartooth Mountains.

MINERAL RESOURCES

SAND AND GRAVEL

Sand and gravel have been mined for road and concrete aggregate throughout the county (see map on next page for active gravel pits). Alluvium found in stream valley and glacial out-washes from foothill terraces near Fishtail and Nye have been a consistent source of aggregate. Sand and gravel have been mined from the lake basin deposits in the north part of the county around Big Lake. Some more-resistant sandstone units have also been processed for aggregate. These units include the Fort Union formation, Hell Creek formation and some sandstone members of the Montana Group.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SWEET GRASS CO
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Keating
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
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Free River Ranch
Reed Point
Laurel
Columbus
Kovanda
Park City
78
Bill Thompson
Absarokee
Eggers
Gaustad
Aadland
Joliet
212
Nye
Fishtail
Arnold
Fromberg
CARBON CO
Bridger
78
Red Lodge
PARK CO

BENTONITE

Many Cretaceous shales may contain mineable bentonite beds although none are currently producing.

BUILDING STONE

Sandstone from the Hell Creek formation was quarried near Columbus. The sandstone is considered to have excellent bearing strength and resists weathering. No current production is reported.

COAL

The only reported coal occurrence is located in Section 20, T. 4 S., R. 16 E., near Nye. The Tandy Coal Mine produced sub-bituminous coal from the Cretaceous Eagle sandstone formation, Montana Group. The coal occurs in two beds, ranging between two and six feet thick and has a sulfur content of .5 %, an ash content of 18.1 %, and heating value of 10,130 BTU.

OIL AND GAS

Several producing oil and gas fields are located in the county. Southeast of Fishtail, between Dean and East Rosebud Creek, oil and gas have been produced from four separate fields: the Dean Dome, Fiddler Creek, Roscoe Dome, and MacKay Dome. Each field lies along the Nye-Bowler Lineament, a series of antic lines and domes which extends for approximately 60 miles along the Beartooth Mountain front. The producing horizons are the lower Cretaceous Greybull sandstone and Lakota sandstone of the Colorado Group. The Dean Dome produced a total of 75,502 barrels of oil as of 1983, Fiddler Creek produced approximately 1,800 barrels, and Roscoe Dome produced approximately 1,672 barrels. No data is available for the MacKay Dome. As of February 1995, there was no production reported and no operating permits pending.

Several gas fields in the north part of the county near Big Coulee, Rapelje, and Big Lake have produced gas from the upper Cretaceous sandstone units of the Montana Group. Production for 1994 in the Big Coulee field was reported to be 151,419 mcf, 301,577 mcf from Six Shooter field west of Rapelje, and 4,275 mcf from Lake Basin. No production was reported in 1994 from the Lake Basin North or Rapelje fields. Stillwater County does have potential coal bed methane resources within its boundaries, however little has occurred in actual development as of late 2004.

HARD ROCK MINERALS

The Stillwater Complex and local intrusive have been the focus of most mineral development activity. Gold and silver mineralization is associated with Cretaceous and Tertiary hydrothermal vein deposits crosscutting and adjacent to the mafic intrusive. Several types of magmatic ore deposits occur within the complex, including sub-economic resources of copper and nickel-

bearing sulfides and chromite, and economic reserves of platinum and palladium-bearing sulfides. The Benbow Mine produced 64,791 tons of concentrate containing 41.5 % chromite and 163,571 tons of ore were mined at the Mountain View property, generating 69,371 tons of concentrate that assayed 38.8 % chromite. Over 900,000 tons of ore were removed from the Mouat Mine, roughly ten million tons, containing 20-22 % chromite, are estimated to remain.

Extensive exploration in the 1970s and 1980s identified the association of platinum group elements (PGE) with the olivine-bearing members known as the J-M Reef. PGE-bearing sulfides occur within a zone that appears to be continuous for most of the 28 mile strike length and averages approximately 0.57 ounces of platinum and palladium per ton. The world class ore body is currently mined by Sibanye-Stillwater. In 1995, proven mining reserves were estimated to be 881,000 tons, averaging 0.86 ounces of platinum and palladium per ton. Probable mining reserves may be as high as 22,071,000 tons, averaging .80 ounces per ton.

GROUND WATER RESOURCES

Hydrologic characteristics vary within stratigraphic units located in Stillwater County. Characteristics range from “not normally an aquifer” to “Good to Excellent aquifers”. Some stratigraphic units still have unknown potential. Additional groundwater studies have been proposed for the Yellowstone River valley.

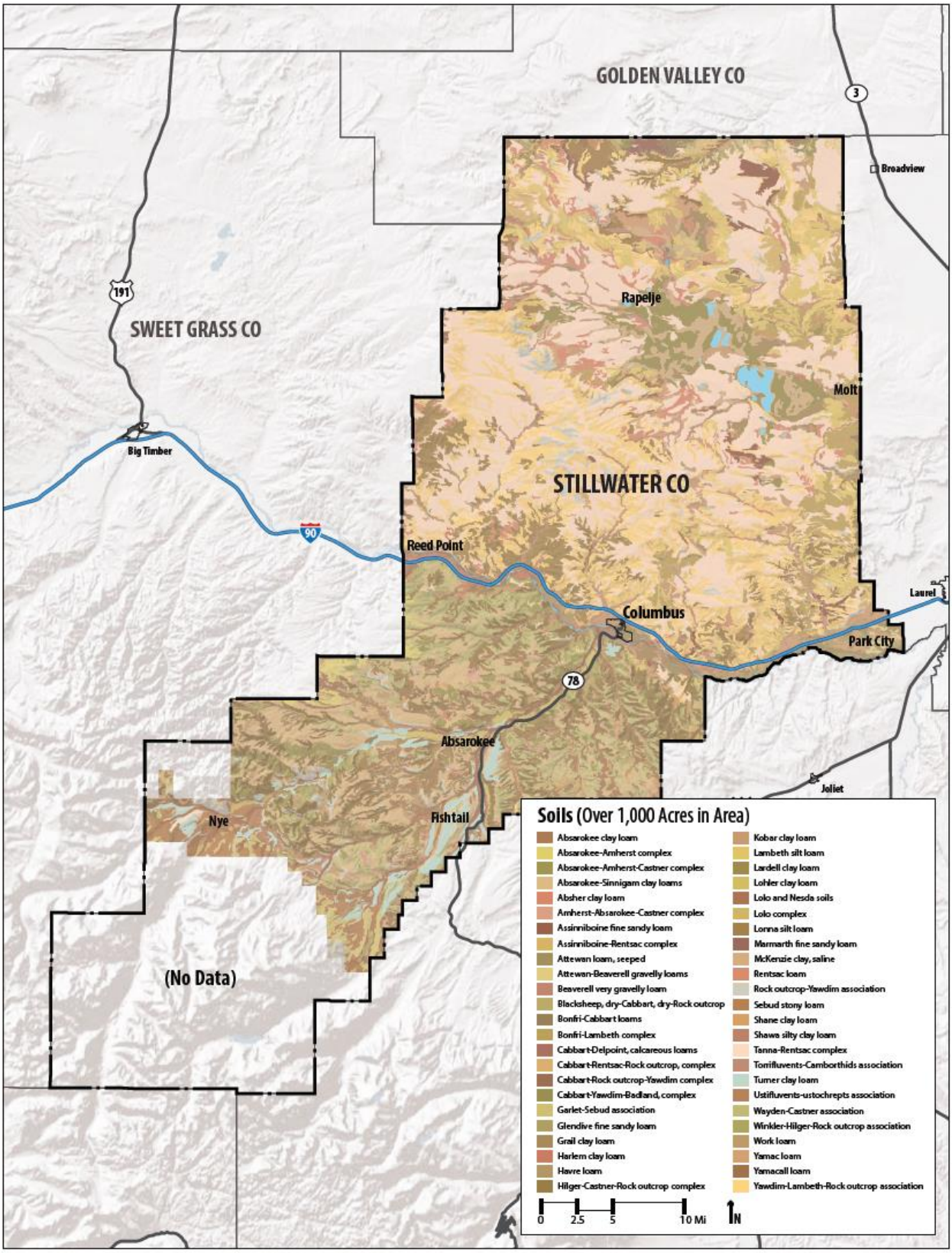
SOILS

Stillwater County has an interesting mix of soils which has been greatly influenced by the geologic history of the area. Soils in the county are formed from sandstone, shale, limestone and granite rocks, with evidence of mixing of these materials in glacial till. Texture of the soils range from sandy to very clayey. Prime farmland is located in valley bottoms of the Yellowstone River, the Stillwater, and Rosebud Creek. Salts and alkali are evident in the same clay soils.

The soils map on page 4-46 is intended to show general soil conditions only. More detailed soils information is contained in the Soil Survey of Stillwater County.

WIND RESOURCES

Stillwater County contains some excellent wind resources, generally located in the northwest portion of the County. Stillwater Wind LLC recently began developing an 80 MW wind farm north of Reed Point.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Reed Point
Laurel
Columbus
Park City
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Absarokee
Joliet
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Fishtail
(No Data)
Soils (Over 1,000 Acres in Area)
Absarokee clay loam
Absarokee-Amherst complex
Absarokee-Amherst-Castner complex
Absarokee-Sinnigam clay loams
Absher clay loam
Amherst-Absarokee-Castner complex
Assinniboine fine sandy loam
Assinniboine-Rentsac complex
Attewan loam, seeped
Attewan-Beaverell gravelly loams
Beaverell very gravelly loam
Blacksheep, dry-Cabbart, dry-Rock outcrop
Bonfri-Cabbart loams
Bonfri-Lambeth complex
Cabbart-Delpoint, calcareous loams
Cabbart-Rentsac-Rock outcrop, complex
Cabbart-Rock outcrop-Yawdim complex
Cabbart-Yawdim-Badland, complex
Garlet-Sebud association
Glendive fine sandy loam
Grail clay loam
Harlem clay loam
Havre loam
Hilger-Castner-Rock outcrop complex
Kobar clay loam
Lambeth silt loam
Lardell clay loam
Lohler clay loam
Lolo and Nesda soils
Lolo complex
Lonna silt loam
Marmarth fine sandy loam
McKenzie clay, saline
Rentsac loam
Rock outcrop-Yawdim association
Sebud stony loam
Shane clay loam
Shawa silty clay loam
Tanna-Rentsac complex
Torrifluvents-Camborthids association
Turner clay loam
Ustifluvents-ustochrepts association
Wayden-Castner association
Winkler-Hilger-Rock outcrop association
Work loam
Yamac loam
Yamacall loam
Yawdim-Lambeth-Rock outcrop association
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TOPOGRAPHY

The topographical features of Stillwater County can be classified as mountains, foothills, river valleys and terraces, eroded uplands, cliffs, and lake basins. Elevation ranges from 3,300 feet above sea level on the Yellowstone River east of Park City to 12,600 feet in the Beartooth Mountains. The shaded elevation map shows the elevation ranges and major topographic features.

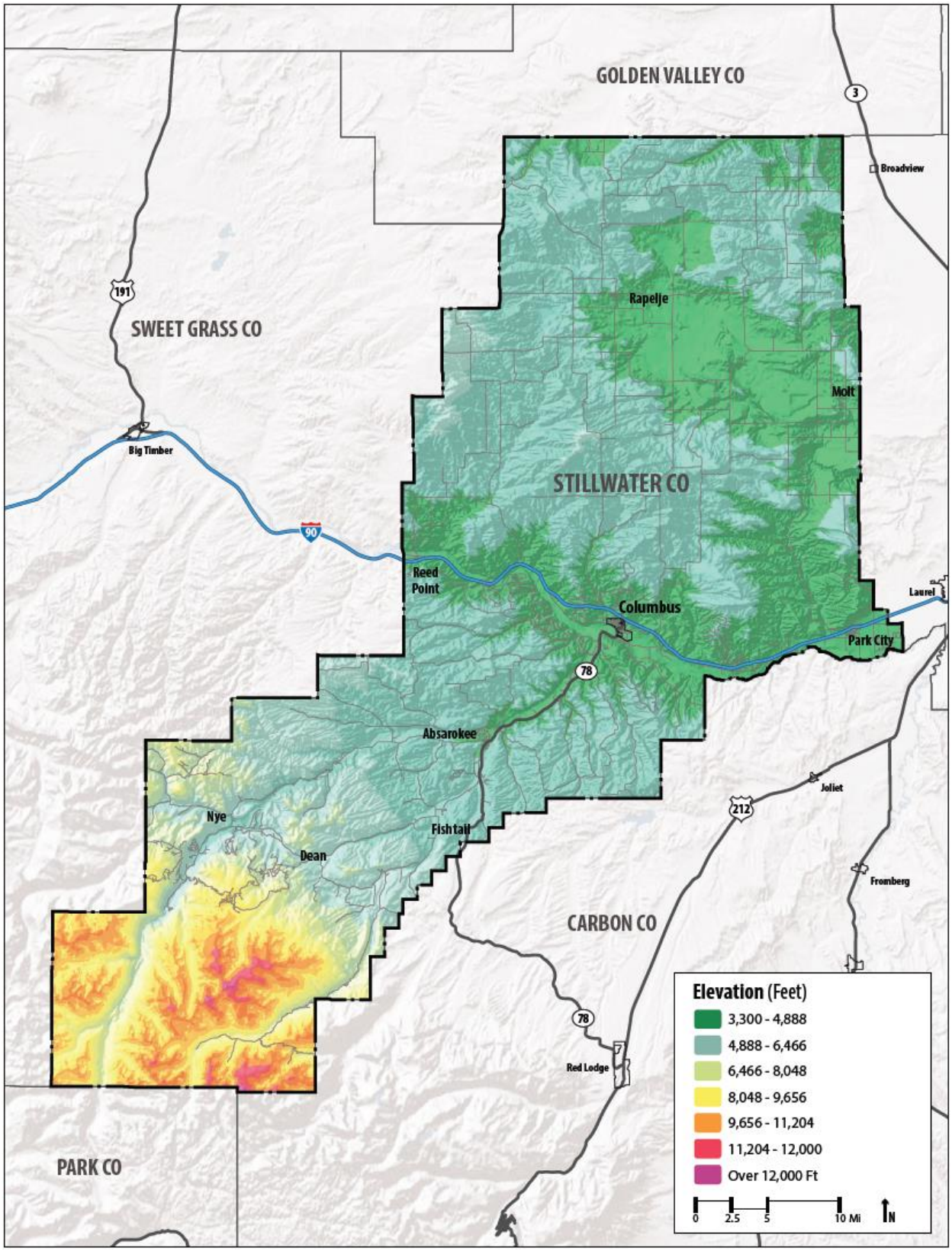
The Beartooth Mountains are located in the southern part of the county on the Custer National Forest. This glaciated landscape has the greatest local variation in relief within the county. Elevations range from 5,000 to 12,000 feet above sea level within a ten mile distance. The Stillwater River Valley is below 5,000 feet near Nye; the Stillwater Plateau and Fishtail Plateau are around 10,000 feet; Mount Hague, Mount Wood, and Pyramid Mountain all exceed 12,000 feet. Foothills are located between the Beartooth Mountains and Fishtail Creek. These foothills were shaped by unconsolidated sediments derived from glacial out-wash and range in elevation from 5,000 to 7,000 feet.

Most of Stillwater County is drained by the Yellowstone River except Big Coulee Creek and Painted Robe Creek in the northern part of the county, which drain into the Musselshell River. Painted Robe and Big Coulee are prominent topographic features in the northern most part of Stillwater County. Elevations in these coulees are below 4,000 feet. The Yellowstone River Valley is the most prominent topographic feature in the central section of the county and flows in a southeasterly direction. The river cuts through relatively steep cliffs and broad alluvial terraces. The Yellowstone River Valley is below 4,000 feet in elevation and widths range from several hundred feet to more than a mile.

The Stillwater River and the Rosebud Creek drainages are two major tributaries of the Yellowstone River in this area. These tributaries flow northeast from the southern portion of the county. The Reed Point, Springtime, Columbus, Flaherety Flat, and Park City areas are examples of alluvial terraces along the Yellowstone River valley.

A significant part of the county is classified as eroded uplands. The eroded uplands are mostly rolling, dissected, sandstone and shale strata at elevations around 4,000 to 5,000 feet. Shale is less resistant to erosion than sandstone and forms steep sandstone cliffs at various locations. Examples of the eroded uplands topography are located in northern Stillwater County and the central part of the county along the Yellowstone and Stillwater River valleys.

The lake basins in the northern part of the county are confined and poorly drained depressions containing temporary lakes that vary in size annually. The largest basin in the county, Lake Basin, lies in a northwest to southeast direction between Rapelje and Molt. This lake basin is around 4,000 feet in elevation. Hailstone Basin and Wheat Basin are also located in this area.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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Broadview
191
SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
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Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
78
Absarokee
Joliet
212
Nye
Fishtail
Dean
Fromberg
CARBON CO
78
Red Lodge
PARK CO
Elevation (Feet)
3,300 - 4,888
4,888 - 6,466
6,466 - 8,048
8,048 - 9,656
9,656 - 11,204
11,204 - 12,000
Over 12,000 Ft
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Steep slopes in excess of 25% grade are considered to be unsuitable for subdivisions. Steep slopes are associated with individual topographic features and in transitional areas between land forms. For example, between river valleys and eroded uplands, sides of coulees and lake basins, and among the mountains.

WATER RESOURCES

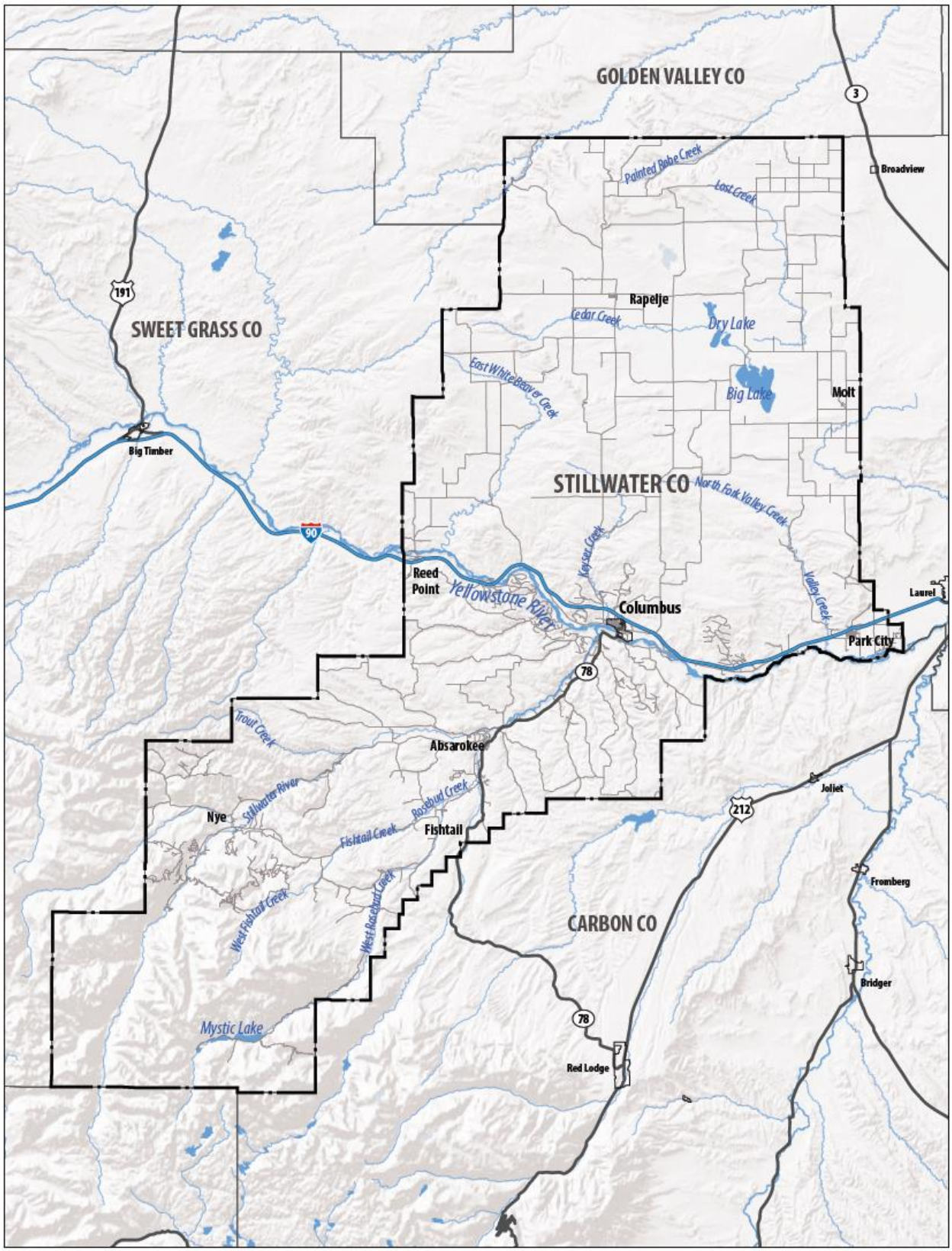
SURFACE WATER

Surface waters in Stillwater County include Dallman Lake, Hunter Lake, Halfbreed Lake and Big Lake in the north central portion. There are numerous mountain lakes such as Emerald, West Rosebud, Mystic, Island, Silver Lake, Sioux Charlie, Chrome Lakes and Lake Wilderness in the Custer National Forest in the southwestern portion of the county. These high mountain lakes feed the Stillwater and Rosebud drainage areas from the Stillwater Plateau, Fishtail Plateau and Beartooth Plateau and are an important water resource of Stillwater County.

A relatively small portion of northern Stillwater County drains into the Musselshell River Basin from Big Coulee Creek and Painted Robe Creek. Most of the county is in the Yellowstone River Basin. The Yellowstone River flows easterly through the center of the county. Its main tributaries from the north are White Beaver Creek, Keyser Creek, Berry Creek and Valley Creek. The main tributaries flowing from the south are Countryman Creek and the Stillwater River with all of its tributaries. Tributaries to the Stillwater River include Shane Creek, Joe Hill Creek, Whitebird Creek, Beaver Creek, Rosebud Creek, Jack Stone Creek, Spring Creek, Grove Creek, Trout Creek, Bad Canyon Creek, Midnight Canyon Creek, Little Rocky Creek, Castle Creek, Lodgepole Creek, Prairie Creek, Nye Creek, Woodbine Creek and numerous other smaller tributaries. Tributaries to Rosebud Creek include Butcher Creek, East Rosebud Creek, Antelope Creek, West Rosebud Creek, Fiddler Creek and Fishtail Creek.

Stream flow volumes on the Yellowstone River differ greatly within the area. Peak flow usually occurs May to July. Average flows of 3,757 cfs have been recorded up river at Livingston and 6,913 cfs down river at Billings. Water temperatures range from 34º in the winter to 69º in July. Water quality of the Yellowstone River is variable. Total dissolved solids can vary from 60 mg/l to 100 mg/l and pH was between 6.5 to 9.2. Slightly elevated levels of iron, lead, manganese and selenium have been reported.

The Stillwater River drains over 900 square miles. Flows range from 600 cfs in the winter to 4900 cfs during peak flow May to July. An average flow of 991 cfs has been recorded at the gage station between Columbus and Absarokee. Water temperatures range from 32º in the winter to 55º in July. Water quality of the Stillwater River is generally good to excellent. Total dissolved solids are typically below 100 mg/l. Dissolved solids, alkalinity, and hardness increase gradually downstream. Alkalinity averaged 60 mg/l and the pH was between 6.3 to 9.9. Slightly elevated levels of iron, lead, manganese and cadmium have been reported.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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Broadview
Painted Robe Creek
Lost Creek
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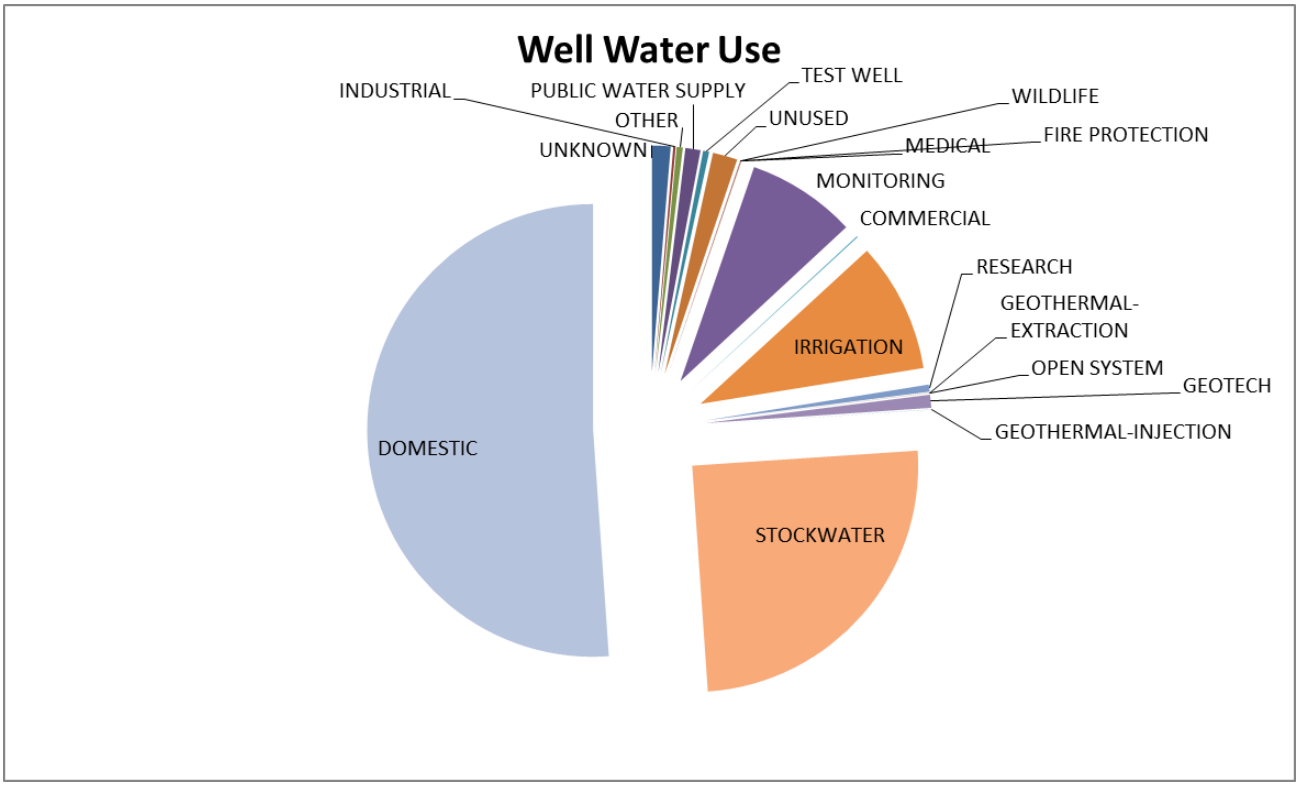
SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Cedar Creek
Dry Lake
East White Beaver Creek
Big Lake
Molt
Big Timber
STILLWATER CO
North Fork Valley Creek
90
Kaiser Creek
Reed Point
Yellowstone River
Columbus
Valley Creek
Laurel
Park City
78
Trout Creek
Absarokee
Stillwater River
Rosebud Creek
Joliet
212
Nye
Fishtail Creek
Fishtail
Fromberg
West Fishtail Creek
West Rosebud Creek
CARBON CO
Bridger
Mystic Lake
78
Red Lodge

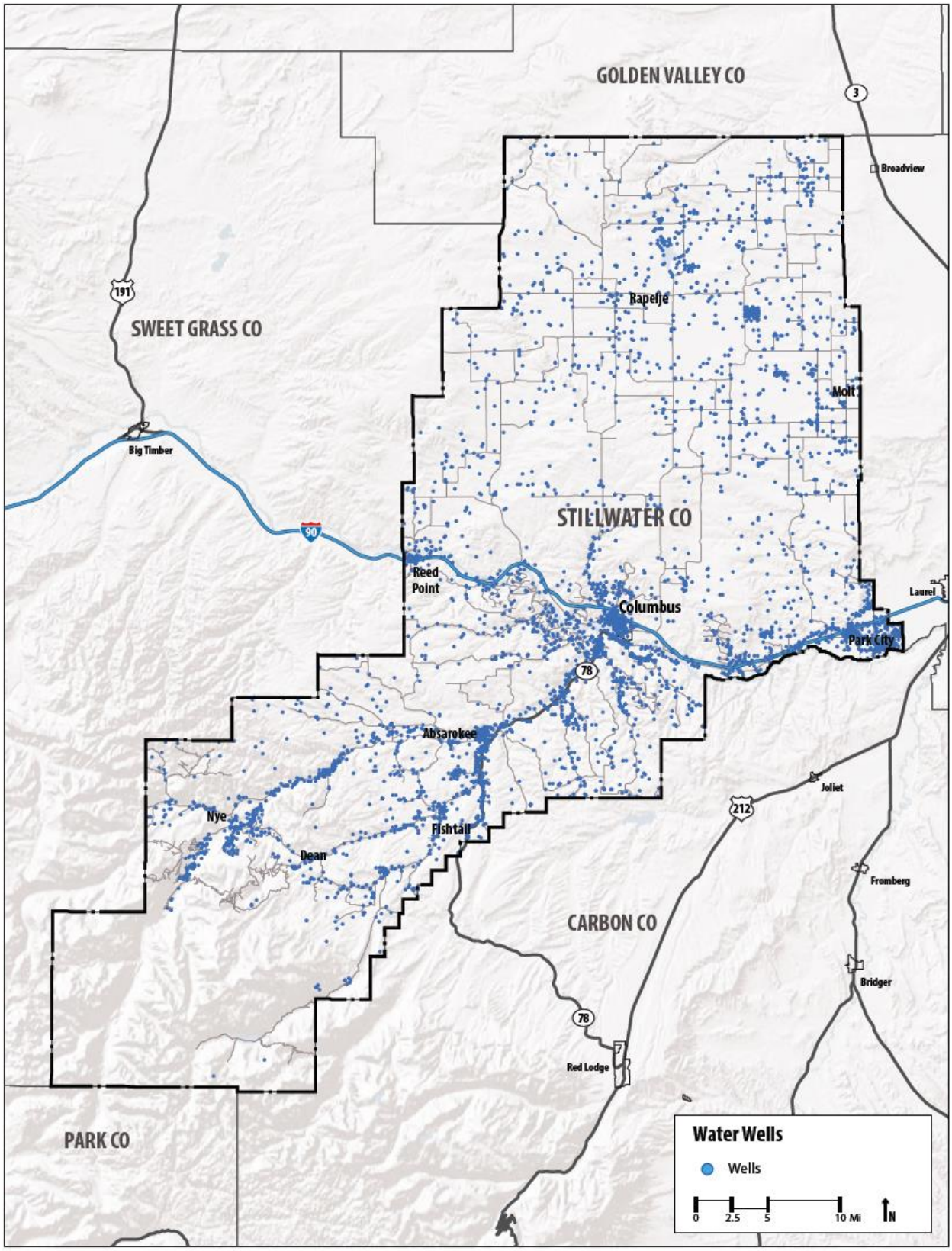
Rosebud Creek drains about 400 square miles. Flows range from 200 cfs in the winter to 1400 cfs during peak flow May to July. An average flow of 438 cfs has been recorded at the gage station above Absarokee. Water temperatures range from 32º in the winter to 55º in July. Water quality of Rosebud Creek is generally good to excellent.

GROUND WATER

Groundwater is available from alluvium sands, terrace gravels, limestone and sandstone rocks. The Bearpaw shale is not normally an aquifer. Groundwater in the Yellowstone valley flows in an easterly direction and groundwater in the Stillwater valley flows in a northerly direction. Recharge to the aquifers is primarily from infiltration of precipitation on the outcrops, infiltration from stream flow, interaquifer leakage or from subsurface flow.

There are several hundred ground water appropriations filed in Stillwater County. The water is used for domestic purposes, stock watering and for municipal water supplies. Large supplies of ground water can be obtained from the alluvial deposit along the river valleys of the Rosebud, Stillwater and Yellowstone. Wells in the Yellowstone Valley have been found to produce flows ranging from ten gallons per minute to 300 gallons per minute. Along the Rosebud and Stillwater Rivers, wells yield flows varying from eight gallons per minute to 250 gallons per minute. These wells vary in depth from twenty feet to eighty feet.

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Red Lodge
PARK CO
Water Wells
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Reed Point, Columbus and Park City have wells which produce an adequate supply of water and are from 20 to 50 feet deep. Water is obtained from the alluvial deposits. Absarokee has a very adequate supply of ground water from the alluvial deposits of Rosebud Creek and the Stillwater River with a well drawing water from a sandstone layer about 100 feet deep. Wells near Fishtail produce adequate water from a depth of around 110 feet. Ground water supply is available to all cities and town within the county in varying quantities.

Ground water supply in the northeastern area of the county is limited. Water bearing deposits such as the Judith River Sandstone and Eagle Sandstone produce small quantities of water. Recorded flows vary from two gallons per minute to twenty-five gallons per minute. Depths are from 50 feet to over 100 feet. The greater depths do not necessarily result in increased flows. Reports on wells at Rapelje show an average depth of well at 80 feet, with average flows of about nine gallons per minute. This is an indication of the ground water supply available north of the Yellowstone Valley. An average well depth near Molt is about 135 feet and the average flow per well is about nine gallons per minute.

Ground water quality varies greatly among each aquifer. Near neutral range for pH was reported from 7.3 to 7.5. Total dissolved solids ranged from 1500 to over 3000 mg/l. Average hardness ranged from 170 to 1500 mg/l with most ground water being in the hard to very hard range. However ground water from some alluvium deposits and the Eagle Sandstone is considered "soft water". Concentrations of trace elements were commonly less than maximums set for drinking water standards set by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency. However, concentrations of iron, manganese, lead, selenium and cadmium exceeded the standards in some samples.

IRRIGATION DITCHES

County records indicate approximately 91 ditches exist in Stillwater County. The following major ditches transport surface water for agricultural uses: The Big Ditch, Butcher Creek, Rosebud Ditch, Yellowstone Ditch, Flaherety Ditch, Garrigus Ditch, Gilbert and Tunnel Ditch, Italian Ditch, Mendenhall Ditch, Merrill Ditch, Old Mill Ditch, Phelps Ditch, Reed Point Ditch, Shane Ditch, Columbus Irrigation Project, Cove Ditch, and Kem-Mulherin Ditch (Buck and Oravetz, 1946).

VEGETATION

The major factors affecting vegetation distribution in the county are: (1) slope, (2) aspect, (3) moisture availability (4) human and animal activities. Establishment of plants is more difficult on steep slopes due to decreasing soil stability and a greater frequency of soil movement. Plants which do become established on steep slopes are important soil stabilizers, and removal of the vegetation increases erosion. Slope aspect affects vegetation distribution primarily by influencing available soil moisture. North facing slopes are shaded more and lose less moisture due to evaporation. The north facing draws seem to exhibit this best in the jurisdictional area. These draws are usually heavily forested with Ponderosa Pine and display a substantial under story growth. Disturbances of natural grasslands such as grazing, fire, and cultivation bring about changes in the composition of plant communities. Invasion of big sagebrush, short grasses and annual and perennial forbs are evident on overgrazed rangeland.

MAJOR ECOSYSTEMS

Vegetation within Stillwater County has been classified into ecosystems. Montane forest, intermountain grassland, riparian, plains forest, and plains grassland ecosystems are representative of vegetation communities identified in the county. Agricultural lands also provide a variety of range and farmland vegetation. The brief description of these ecosystems indicates their location within the county and associated characteristics (Ross and Hunter, 1976).

Montane forest ecosystem of the Beartooth Mountains is partially located in southern Stillwater County. This area is managed by the Custer National Forest including the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Vegetation of this area includes alpine tundra plants and high elevation meadow grasses such as stonecrop, moss silene, red mountain heath, sedge, yellow avens, tufted phlox, shrubby cinquefoil, bluejoint, sheep fescue, alpine bluegrass, timothy, and native legumes. Trees include whitebark pine, subalpine fir, spruce, Douglas fir and lodgepole pine. Substantial aspen stands occur in wet creek bottoms or spring fed drainages. Elevation, aspect, moisture and soil type determine vegetative distribution. Douglas fir/lodgepole forests are usually dense with little under story development while aspen stands contain a diverse under story of shrubs, herbaceous and grass species. Areas of steep terrain covered by trees, brush, and dense undergrowth are the primary fire hazards. The density of this growth varies, but appears to be heaviest in shaded drainages where greater amounts of moisture are available.

The intermountain grassland ecosystem is located in the foothills between the Yellowstone River valley and the Beartooth Mountains in southern Stillwater County. This ecosystem type is located on relatively flat to steep mountain benches and foothills. The majority of this foothill grassland is located on private ranches. Vegetation includes wheatgrass, needle grass, thickspike, wild rye, June grass, lupine, fescue, balsamroot, and larkspur. These grasslands provide pasture for beef cattle, sheep and horses.

Riparian and wetland ecosystems are plant communities closely associated with rivers, streams and wet soils. Wetland areas in Stillwater County include springs, cattail marshes, sedge meadows, seeps, bogs, abandoned river oxbows, ponds, lakes and other areas that support wetland vegetation. Some areas that are seasonally flooded can also be considered wetlands. They are marked by high water tables. They can vary greatly in plant species composition depending on elevation, size of the drainage and soil type. In Stillwater County riparian ecosystems include broad cottonwood forests along the Yellowstone River and its major tributaries; herbaceous riparian complex along narrow stream banks with willow, alder, dogwood, snowberry, wild roses, chokecherry shrubs, sedges and forbs in the southern part of the county; coulees with perennial or intermittent streams in central and northern locations within the county. Ephemeral wetlands of northern Stillwater County are undrained depressions that retain water and support herbaceous wetland vegetation usually in the spring and during wet years. In areas of saline soils, alkali sacaton, Nuttall saltgrass, inland saltgrass and perennial forbs dominate. These riparian and wetland ecosystems serve as aquifer recharge areas, help maintain water quality and reduce the impacts of seasonal flooding.

The Plains forest ecosystem is located in the rolling to steep hills adjoining the Yellowstone River valley in central Stillwater County. This ecosystem type is located on hilly terrain with relatively open ponderosa pine forest cover with associated vegetation including Rocky

Mountain juniper, wheatgrass, skunk brush, snowberry, needleandthread, and native legumes. The majority of the plains forest ecosystem is located on private land. The steep hills covered with trees, brush, and grasses contain the greatest fire hazard.

The Plains grassland ecosystem is located in northern Stillwater County. In addition to a variety of wheat, vegetation in the plains grassland ecosystem includes wheatgrass, needle grass, June grass, reedgrass, sandreed, milkvetches, sagebrush, thickspike, and other native legumes.

CRITICAL PLANT COMMUNITIES

State ranked critically imperiled plant species located in Stillwater County include arctic pearlwort, pygmy gentian, arctic buttercup found in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, plus the few-flowered goldenrod found in the Stillwater valley and musk root found in the Jackstone Creek drainage. Ice grass, slender gentian, located in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, and small yellow lady's slipper, located near Nye, have a state rank of imperiled. The bluebunch wheatgrass/prairie June grass plant community type located north of Park City, near Miller Butte, is considered rare for this part of its range (Natural Heritage Program, 1995).

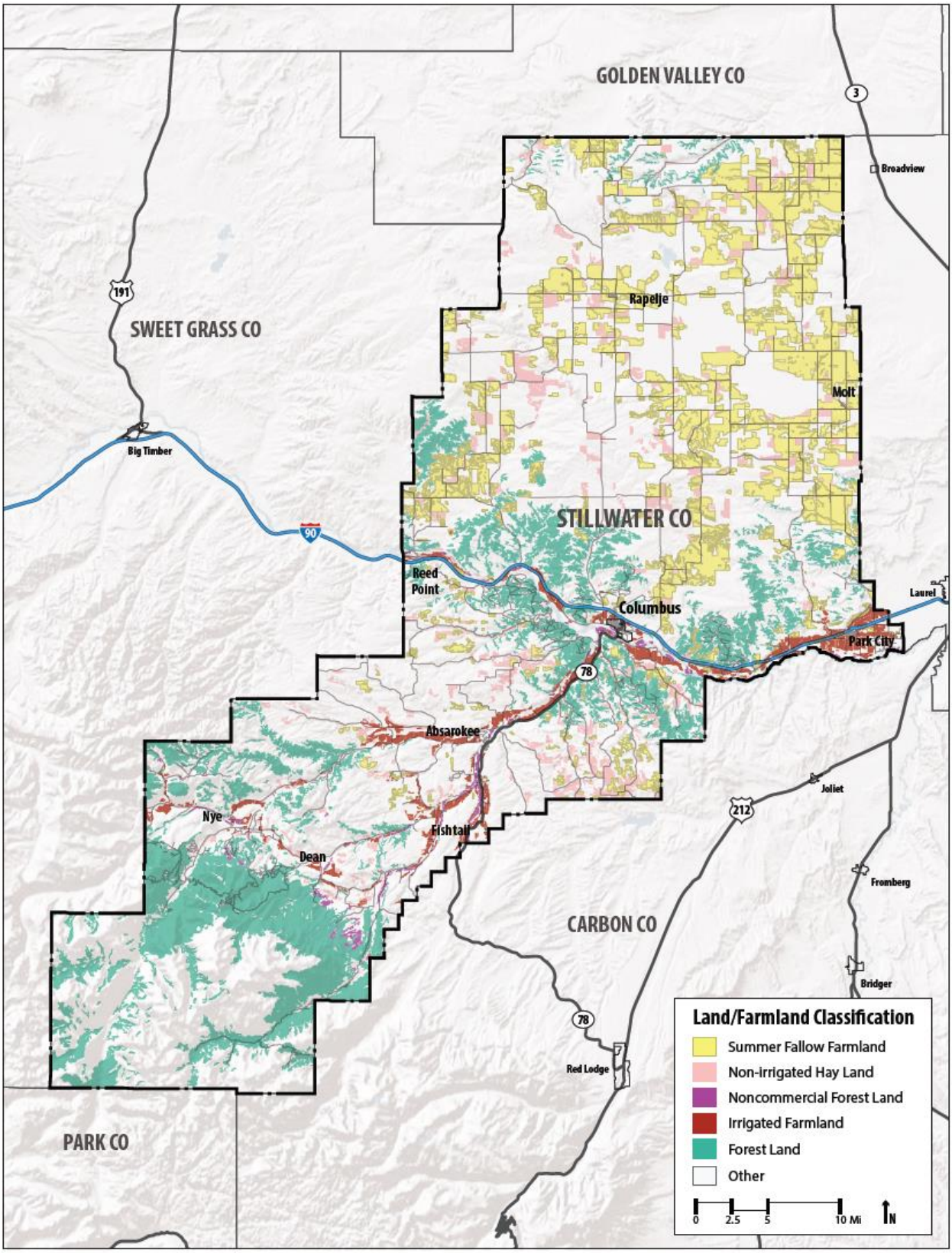
Vegetation on stream banks, steep or unstable slopes, or on soils highly erodible by water or wind is also critical plant communities. The riparian vegetation associated with the Yellowstone, Stillwater, and Rosebud River drainages and along many of the tributaries represents critical plant communities. Steep slopes in the county are usually covered by the grassland and forested grassland type plant communities which are critical for slope stability.

AGRICULTURAL LANDS AND CROPS

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up or water. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable methods.

In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air. Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.

Approximately 56,500 acres within Stillwater County are classified prime farmland. This prime farmland is located in the Butcher Creek, West Rosebud Creek, Stillwater River and Yellowstone River drainages. Additional farmland would be considered prime if it was irrigated.


GOLDEN VALLEY CO
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Rapelje
Molt
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STILLWATER CO
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
78
Absarokee
Joliet
212
Nye
Fishtail
Dean
Fromberg
CARBON CO
Bridger
78
Red Lodge
PARK CO
Land/Farmland Classification
Summer Fallow Farmland
Non-irrigated Hay Land
Noncommercial Forest Land
Irrigated Farmland
Forest Land
Other
0
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Another 51,690 acres is considered farmland of statewide importance. Farmland of statewide importance is dry or irrigated farmland that is nearly prime and that produces high yields of crops economically when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. This land is located along drainages and benches adjacent to creeks in southern and the central portions of the county. There is also farmland of statewide importance located in the Lake Basin area in northern Stillwater County.

NOXIOUS WEEDS

The following noxious weeds exist throughout Montana as well as Stillwater County.

Category 1: Category 1 noxious weeds are weeds that are currently established and generally widespread in many counties of the state. Management criteria include awareness and education, containment and suppression of existing infestations and prevention of new infestations. These weeds are capable of rapid spread and render land unfit or greatly limit beneficial uses.

(a) Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*)
(b) field bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*)
(c) whitetop or hoary cress (*Cardaria draba*)
(d) leafy spurge (*Euphorbia esula*)
(e) Russian knapweed (*Centaurea repens*)
(f) spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*)
(g) diffuse knapweed (*Centaurea diffusa*)
(h) Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica*)
(i) St. Johnswort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
(j) sulfur (erect) cinquefoil (*Potentilla recta*)
(k) common tansy(*Tanacetum vulgare* L.)
(l) ox-eye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* L.)
(m) houndstongue (*Cynoglossum officinale* L.
(n) yellow toadflax (*Linaria vulgaris*)

C**ategory 2:** Category 2 noxious weeds have recently been introduced into the state or are rapidly spreading from their current infestation sites. These weeds are capable of rapid spread and invasion of lands, rendering lands unfit for beneficial uses. Management criteria include awareness and education, monitoring and containment of known infestations and eradication where possible.

(a) dyers woad (*Isatis tinctoria*)
(b) purple loosestrife or lythrum *(Lythrum salicaria*, *L. virgatum*, and any hybrid crosses
(c) tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobea* L.)
(d) meadow hawkweed complex *(Hieracium pratense*, *H. floribundum*, *H. piloselloides)*
(e) orange hawkweed *(Hieracium aurantiacum* L.*)*
(f) tall buttercup *(Ranunculus acris* L.)
(g) tamarisk [saltcedar] (*Tamarix* spp.)
(h) Perennial pepperweed *(Lepidium latifolium)*

Category 3: Category 3 noxious weeds have not been detected in the state or may be found in only small, scattered, localized infestations. Management criteria include awareness and

education, early detection, and immediate action to eradicate infestations. These weeds are known pests in nearby states and are capable of rapid spread and render land unfit for beneficial uses.

(a) yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis)*
(b) common crupina (*Crupina vulgaris*)
(c) rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*)
(d) Eurasian watermilfoil (*Myriophyllum spicatum*)
(e) yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)

The characteristics of some of these weeds are as follows: Leafy spurge is a deep rooted perennial forb that spreads by seeds and roots and can reduce cattle and wildlife grazing capacity up to 90%. It is very difficult to control once it becomes established. This weed is a particular problem in the Yellowstone and Stillwater river drainages in the southern half of the county.

Spotted knapweed is a biennial or short lived perennial which causes loss of crop production, wildlife habitat, increases moisture runoff, soil erosion, and stream sedimentation. This weed is a concern county wide. Russian knapweed is a deep-rooted, rhizomatous, perennial forb that can cause nervous disorders if consumed by horses.

Houndstongue is a biennial plant with a taproot and a cluster of leaves during the first year of growth but attains heights up to four feet. It also has dark red flowers in terminal clusters. This weed adversely affects rangeland in the foothills of southern Stillwater County.

Dalmatian toadflax is a perennial plant which greatly reduces livestock and wildlife grazing capacity. Dalmatian toadflax reproduces by seed and roots, has bright yellow snap-dragon-like flowers with a long spur and is very difficult to control once it becomes established. This weed is a problem along highways and the railroad across the county.

Canada thistle is a perennial form reproducing by seed and creeping root stocks. Canada thistle has purple flower heads with male and female flowers on separate plants and can produce up to 20,000 seeds per year per plant.

Sulfur cinquefoil is a long-lived perennial with a woody rootstock, numerous stem leaves and few basal leaves. It is well-adapted to dry open range and pasture areas. This weed is a problem south of the Yellowstone River.

Field bindweed is a prostrate, perennial vine with an extensive rhizomatous root system and funnel-shaped pale pink to white flowers. The field bindweed has seeds that can remain viable in the soil for more than 60 years. This weed is a problem in the wheat fields of northern Stillwater County.

Whitetop is a deep rooted perennial forb that spreads by seeds and root fragments. Whitetop emerges very early in the spring and sets seed by mid summer. This weed is a problem in Reed Point area and along major rivers in the county.

WILDLIFE AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

MAJOR WILDLIFE HABITAT

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks has classified wildlife habitats by ecosystem. Montane forest, intermountain grassland, riparian, plains forest, and plains grassland ecosystems are representative of wildlife habitat identified in the Stillwater County. Agricultural lands are also used by wildlife as habitat (Jorgensen, 1994).

This section briefly describes these habitats, their location within the county and associated wildlife occurrences (Ross and Hunter, 1976).

The Montane forest ecosystem of the Beartooth Mountains is partially located in southern Stillwater County. This area is managed by the Custer National Forest and includes the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Vegetation of this area includes alpine tundra plant communities, high elevation meadow grasses, whitebark pine, subalpine fir, spruce, Douglas fir and lodgepole pine. Elevation, aspect, moisture and soil type determine vegetative distribution. Substantial aspen stands occur in wet soil conditions including creek bottoms and spring fed drainages. Douglas fir/lodgepole forests are usually dense with little under story development while aspen stands contain a diverse under story of shrubs, herbaceous and grass species. Montane forests provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife plus important escape and thermal cover adjacent to intermountain grassland feeding areas for big game species. Elk, moose, deer, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, black bears, mountain lions, wolves and grizzly bears inhabit the mountain ecosystem located in southern Stillwater County. Other large mammals, predators, furbearers, and a variety of birds occur in this ecosystem. Rainbow, brown, cutthroat and brook trout also inhabit some lakes and streams of the Montane forest ecosystem.

The intermountain grassland ecosystem is located in the foothills between the Yellowstone River valley and the Beartooth Mountains in southern Stillwater County. This habitat type favors relatively flat to steep mountain benches and foothills. The majority of this foothill grassland is located on privately owned ranches. Vegetation includes wheatgrass, needle grass, wild rye, June grass, lupine, fescue, balsamroot, and larkspur. These grasslands provide pasture for beef cattle, sheep and horses. Elk and mule deer also use this habitat for winter range. Big game winter ranges are critical factors in supporting elk and deer populations when food is generally unavailable elsewhere. In the winter there is a preference for south and west slopes, wind blown areas and hay meadows. Mule deer often forage close to roads and can develop specific movement patterns between evening and morning feeding areas and daytime bedding areas. Activity along these corridors is routine and mule deer related vehicle accidents occur.

Riparian habitats are water tolerant plant communities closely associated with rivers, streams and wet soils. They can vary greatly in plant species composition depending on elevation, size of the drainage and soil type. In Stillwater County riparian habitats include broad cottonwood forests along the Yellowstone River and its major tributaries; narrow stream banks with willow, dogwood, and chokecherry shrubs in the southern part of the county; coulees with perennial or intermittent streams in central and northern locations within the county. Wetland areas in Stillwater County include springs, marshes, seeps, bogs, abandoned river oxbows, ponds, lakes

and other areas that support wetland vegetation. Some areas that are seasonally flooded can also be considered wetlands. They are marked by high water tables. Wetlands provide significant wildlife habitat that attract a wide variety of species, particularly waterfowl, non-game birds, furbearers, predators, and white-tailed deer. River shoreline, islands and adjacent wetlands also provide suitable nesting habitat for geese and other waterfowl. Riparian and wetland areas help maintain good water quality and reduce the impacts of seasonal flooding.

The plains forest ecosystem is located in the rolling to steep hills adjoining the Yellowstone River valley in central Stillwater County. This habitat type is located on hilly terrain with relatively open ponderosa pine forest cover with associated vegetation including Rocky Mountain juniper, wheatgrass, skunk brush, snowberry, needleandthread, and native legumes. The majority of this plains forest ecosystem is located on privately owned land. Elk, mule deer and wild turkeys use this habitat year-round. The proximity of the forested areas to croplands and hayfields along the Yellowstone River allows mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and wild turkeys to utilize agricultural lands for feeding and the forested areas for escape, security cover and rearing of young.

The Plains grassland ecosystem and interspersed dryland grain fields in northern Stillwater County provide habitat for antelope, grouse, pheasants, falcons, hawks and deer. In addition to a variety of wheat, vegetation in the plains grassland ecosystem includes wheatgrass, needle grass, June grass, reedgrass, sandreed, milkvetches, sagebrush, thickspike, and other native legumes. Brushy coulees also provide forage, security and escape cover for wildlife that feed in the adjacent agricultural areas.

Agricultural lands are seasonal sources of food for mule deer, white-tailed deer, antelope, geese, waterfowl and other birds. Use of irrigated hayfields in the southern part of the county and dryland crops in northern Stillwater County by wildlife results in some net loss in commercial production. Livestock are also vulnerable to predation from coyotes, wolves, bear and mountain lions.

WILDLIFE SPECIES DIVERSITY

The diversity of wildlife species in Stillwater County includes big game species and other ungulates, fur bearers, raptors, upland game birds, numerous other birds, waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles, and several species of fish. Mule deer and white-tailed deer are common big game species throughout Stillwater County. Elk, moose, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, black bears, mountain lions, wolves and grizzly bears inhabit the mountain ecosystem located in southern Stillwater County. Pronghorn antelope inhabit the northern part of the county in the plains grassland ecosystem. Other mammals, predators and furbearers are represented by red fox, coyotes, bobcats, lynx, badgers, striped skunks, porcupines, raccoons, weasels, mink, beaver, muskrats, marmots, and pine marten. There are also a variety of small mammals in the county.

There are diverse groups of bird species living in Stillwater County. The raptors include bald eagles, golden eagles, peregrine falcons, prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks, rough-legged hawks, kestrels, great horned owls, burrowing owls, and long eared owls. Upland game birds include ruffed grouse, blue grouse, sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants, wild turkeys, and gray partridges. Waterfowl migrating through the county include whooping cranes, sandhill cranes,

great blue herons, swans, snow geese, Canada geese, pelicans, mallards, pintails, gadwalls, widgeons, shovelers, teal, coots, curlews, canvasbacks, scaups, buffleheads, goldeneyes, ruddy ducks, mergansers, and cormorants. There are numerous other species of birds which have been recorded in Stillwater County. Robins, sparrows, finches, meadowlarks, juncos, wrens, buntings, warblers, flickers, woodpeckers, bluebirds, starlings, crows, red-headed blackbirds, starling, waxwings, chickadees, nuthatches, magpie, jays, terns, gulls, swallows, hummingbirds, larks, ravens, sandpipers, killdeer and mourning doves are some of the more common species noted.

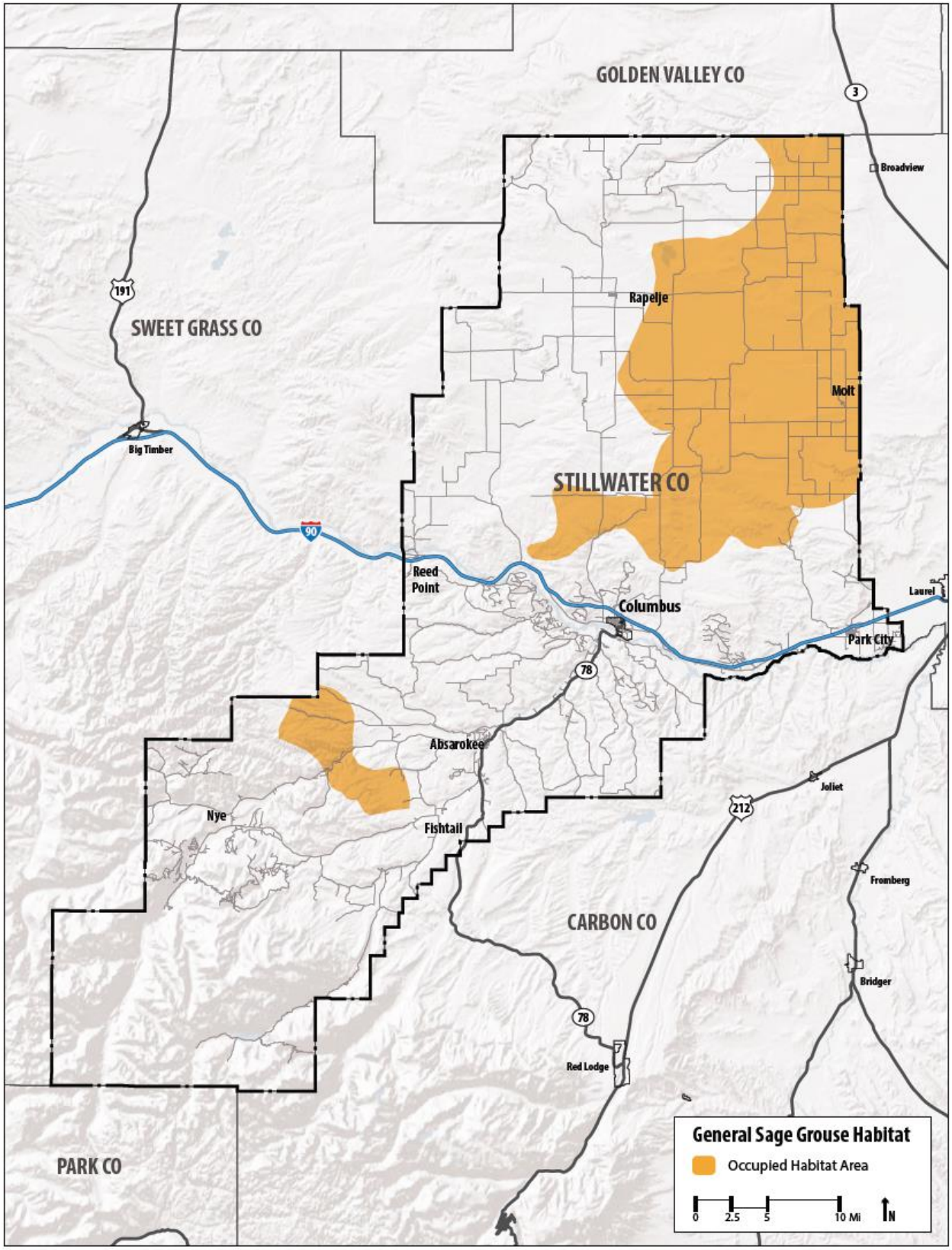
A few notable reptiles and amphibians include frogs, garter snakes, bullsnakes, and prairie rattlesnakes. The primary game fish in Stillwater County include mountain whitefish, ling, rainbow, brown, cutthroat and brook trout.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The grizzly bear, Northern Rocky Mountain wolf, peregrine falcon, and whooping cranes have been listed as threatened or endangered species. Historically bald eagles have nested along the Stillwater and Yellowstone Rivers in Stillwater County. Eagles nest in riparian habitat typically in old growth cottonwood forests. They require an undisturbed area around the nest site. Indications of grizzly bear have been found in the southwestern part of the county. Critical grizzly bear habitat has been designated on the National Forest. Wolf sightings or sign have also been reported in the same area. Information pertaining to peregrine falcons within the county is limited. There have been confirmed sightings in the northeastern part of the county and along the Beartooth Mountains in the southern part of the county. The rocky cliffs and outcrops used for roosting and nesting purposes situated with the large expanses of open grassland offer habitat for these birds. Irregular sightings of whooping cranes indicate they migrate seasonally through the area but do not nest here. The large wetlands on the wildlife refuges in northern Stillwater County and the Yellowstone River with adjoining agricultural fields provide suitable habitat for migrating whooping cranes. The Montana Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation Program shows the County does contain some sage grouse habitat, mostly in the northeast and south central portions of the County (see map on next page). No sage grouse core habitat has been identified in the County.

WILDLIFE REFUGES AND WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREAS

There are two national wildlife refuges located in Stillwater County. Hailstone National Wildlife Refuge and Grass Lake National Wildlife Refuge are located in the north central part of the county between Rapelje and Molt. These refuges are managed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Big Lake, also located in the north central part of the county, is a Wildlife Management Area of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. There are also thirteen fishing access sites managed by Fish, Wildlife & Parks and over sixty sections of state land managed by the Montana Department of State Lands. The Custer National Forest manages the national forest lands in Stillwater County for wildlife and fisheries habitat.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Columbus
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Park City
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Absarokee
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CHAPTER 5: PROJECTED TRENDS

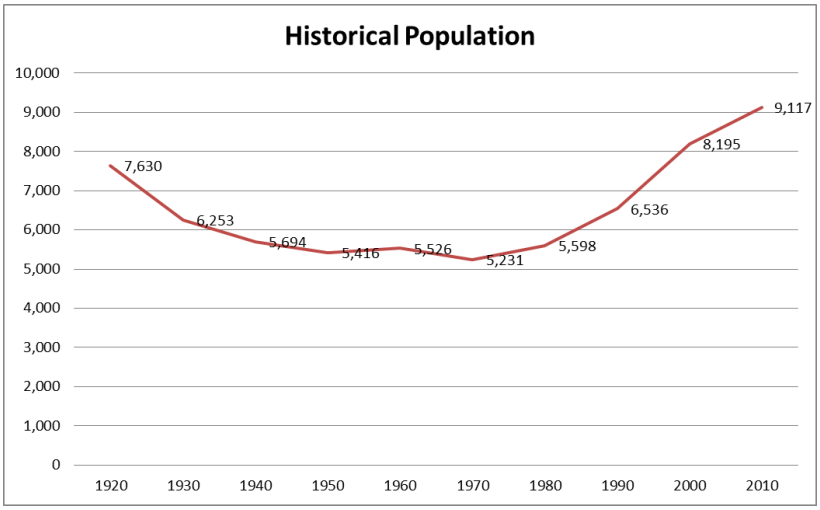
5.1 LAND USE:

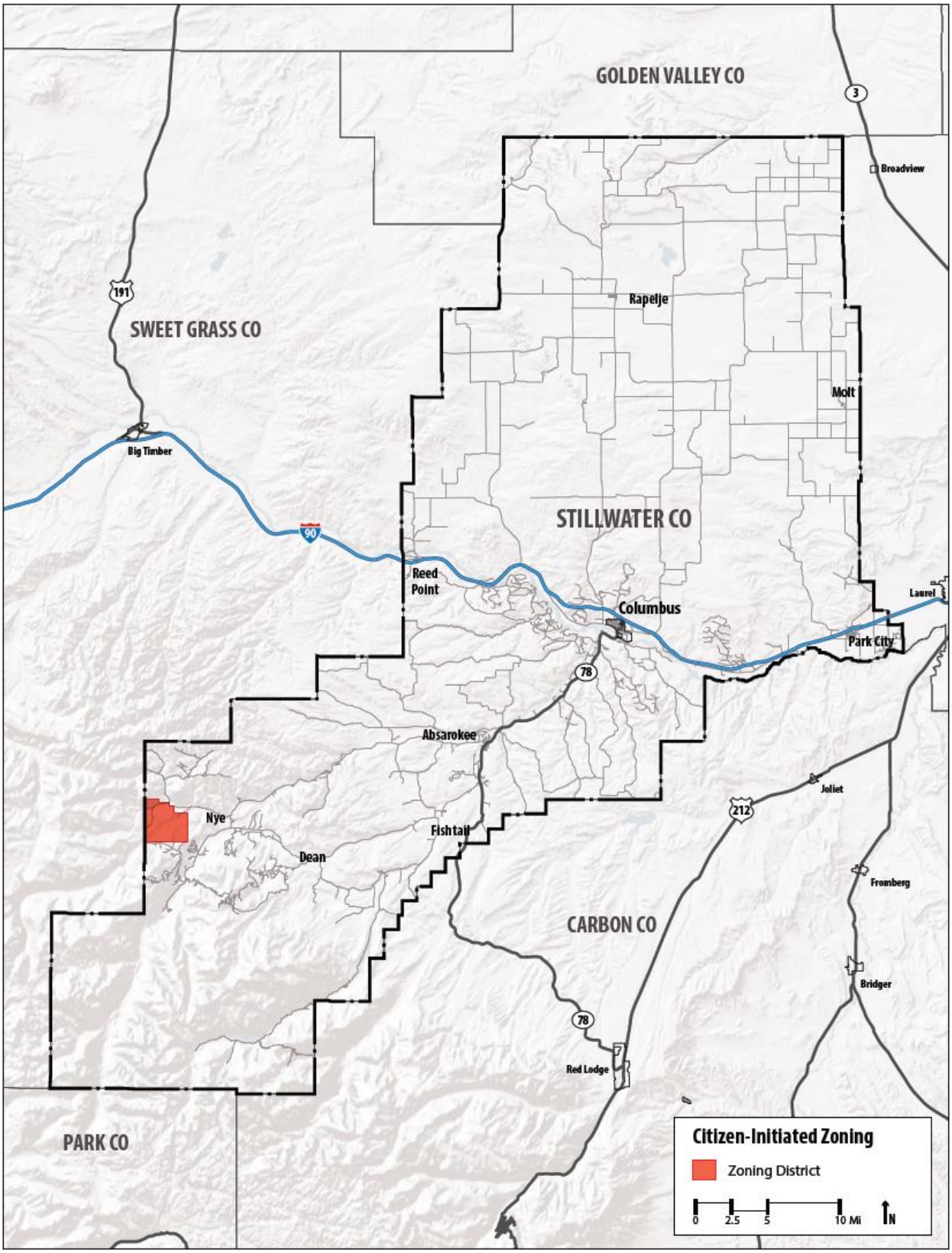
The mix of public and private land use is projected to remain relatively constant with 78% in private ownership. However, private land use is changing as agricultural land and some timberland is converted through the subdivision activity in Stillwater County. The Park City area is currently experiencing the most subdivision activity. Commercial, industrial and other higher density development is projected to remain concentrated in existing town sites with available infrastructure capacity.

Concern has been expressed in resident surveys and community forums about land use conflicts. The trend is to find a balance between property rights and regulating new developments that conflict with existing uses. Examples of land use conflicts include manufacturing plants using flammable or explosive materials locating next to dry land crops; adult entertainment businesses locating near schools, churches and residences; or pre-1976 mobile homes locating near custom built homes. Stillwater County currently has one citizen initiated zoning district on the West Fork of the Stillwater River (see map on page 5-2) and has received petitions and inquiries about creating other planning and zoning districts. This trend may continue in the absence of land use controls, so it may be beneficial for the County to begin evaluating regulatory options now, to avoid addressing issues on a case-by-cases basis.

5.2 POPULATION:

Total population in Stillwater County increased from 8,195 to 9,116 between the 1990 and 2000 Census. Of these, 1,893 people lived in Columbus City limits, meaning the County jurisdiction contained 7,223 people. While not a dramatic as the population increase in the 1980s and 1990s, this continues the trend over the past several censuses that show an increasing population in the County.

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SWEET GRASS CO
Rapelje
Molt
Big Timber
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STILLWATER CO
Reed Point
Columbus
Laurel
Park City
78
Absarokee
Joliet
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Nye
Fishtail
Dean
Fromberg
CARBON CO
Bridger
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Red Lodge
PARK CO
Citizen-Initiated Zoning
Zoning District
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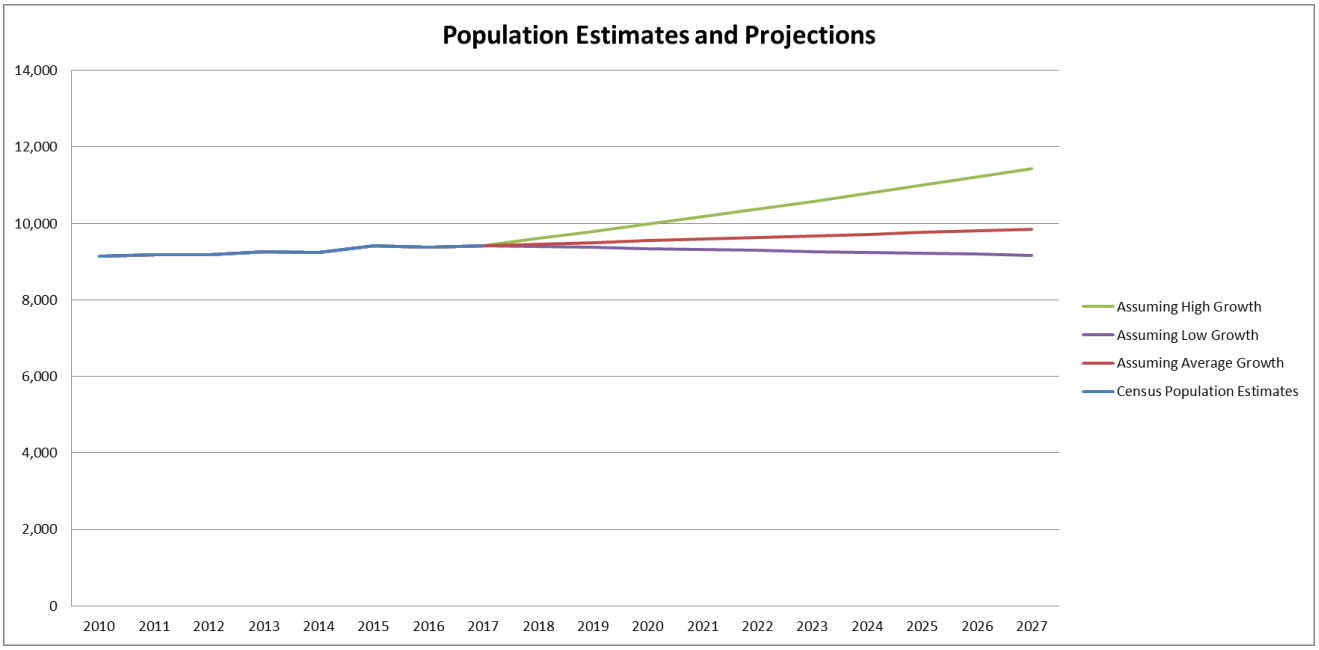
Estimates released by the Census Bureau indicate that the County population has continued to grow through 2017, to over 9,400 people, with an average growth of just less than .5% per year. Taking the highest, lowest, and average estimated growth rats we can estimate that Stillwater County will have a population between 9,300 and 9,800 by the 2020 census, and may top 10,000 in the early 2020s.

The graph below shows Stillwater County population estimates through 2017 and future projections to 2027.



The median age of the population increased from 40.8 to 45.7 from 2000 to 2010, continuing the trend of an aging population, typical of other rural areas. Age groups from 5 years old to 25-44 years old decreased, while the County saw increases in the under 5 age group, as well as the 45 years and up age groups.

The following table shows population by age group for the 1990 through 2010 censuses. The percentage change from 2000 to 2010 is also shown.

Population by Age Group

Age Group	**1990**	**2000**	**2010**	**% Change 2000-2010**
Under 5	476	448	548	+ 18.2
5-17	1,329	1,800	1718	- 4.8
18-24	390	293	292	- 0.3
25-44	1,937	2,206	1913	- 15.3
45-64	1,314	2,262	3150	+ 28.2
65 & over	1,090	1,186	1495	+ 8.6
Under 18	1,805	2,073	2094	+ 1.0
Median Age	36.5	40.8	45.7	

The 2010 Census also provides population figures on a city and census designated place (CDP) level. Also, the American Community Survey provides annual population estimates for these same levels. The following table outlines these figures:

Population by Community

Community	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Absarokee CDP	1,234	1,001	1,063	1,093	1,207	1,074	1,068	1,109
Columbus Town	1,748	2,324	2,079	1,982	2,045	2,250	2,181	2,208
Park City CDP	870	1,023	943	945	1,047	1,072	1,014	944
Reed Point CDP	185	211	260	193	208	219	232	206

This table shows that Columbus, the only incorporated community in the County has remained the largest community, with a population increasing from the 1,700s in 2000 to over 2,000 now. Absarokee was the only community that saw a decrease in population between the 2000 and 2010 censuses, though the population has remained fairly steady ranging from around 1,000 to just over 1,200. Park City's population hovers around the 1,000 mark, while Reed Point typically sits a little over 200.

The level of education for the population showed an increase of over 11% for people with high school diplomas over 1% with a college degree.

Education for Population

Educational level	1990	2000	2010	% Change (2000-2010)
High School Diploma	1,589	2,201	2,449	+11.3
College Degree (4+ yrs)	735	1,005	1,016	+1.1

The average household size remained the same from 2000 at 2.37 individuals per household. This followed a slight decline from 2.39 in 1990. Total number of households continued to increase moving to 3,796 in 2010 from 3,234 in 2000. While this is an increase, it is less dramatic than the increase from 2,579 in 1990 to 3,234 in 2000.
The average family size continued to decline from 3.02 in 1990 and 2.98 in 2000 to 2.84 in 2010. Family households continued to increase, moving from 1,920 in 1990 to 2,348 in 2000, and 2,657 in 2010.

5.3 HOUSING NEEDS:

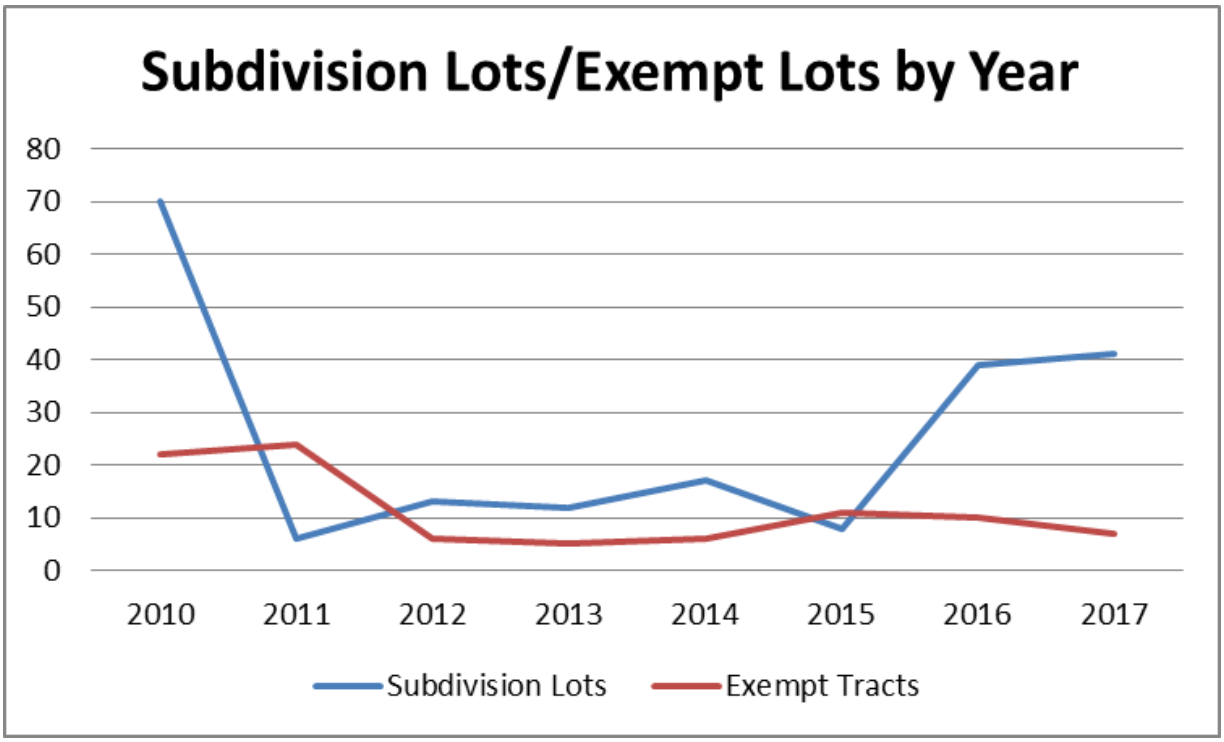
The total number of housing units in Stillwater County continued increasing at about a 20% rate, from 3,947 in 2000 to 4,803 in 2010. There were 3,291 housing units in 1990 Median mortage costs increased from $848 in 2000 to $876 in 2010. Median rent increased more dramatically from $439 per month to $652 during the same time period.

Housing Units

Characteristic	1990	2000	2010	% Change 2000-2010
Total Units	3,291	3,947	4,803	+ 21.7
Occupied	2,523	3,234	3,796	+ 17.4
Owner Occupied	1,857	2,458	2,960	+ 20.4
Renter Occupied	666	776	836	+ 7.7

Since 2010, the planning office has been reviewing an average of seven subdivisions creating 26 new lots and 25 exemption requests creating 11 new lots per year. Typical exemptions that create additional lots are family transfers, agricultural covenants, and court-ordered surveys. The planning office also sees a number of boundary relocation exemptions. Subdivisions reviewed range from small developments of less than five lots, to major subdivisions of more than 20 lots.

Subdivision activity has fallen off significantly since the 2008 housing market crisis. However, there are indications that activity in increasing. The following chart shows the number of lots created by subdivision or exempt survey each year.



The large amount of activity in 2010 can be largely attributed to subdivision approved prior to 2008 facing approval timeframe expirations. While exempt tracts have remained relatively static since 2012, lots created by subdivision have seen an increase the past few years. This trend can be expected to continue, though the national housing market, as well as local economic activity, could have large impacts on the future of subdivision activity.

The Columbus and Park City areas typically experience the most subdivision activity, with over 12 new lots on average being created per year in the Park City, and over 7 in Columbus. Absarokee sees an average of over 4 new subdivision lots per year.

5.4 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS:

Since 2000, the unemployment rate in Stillwater County has dropped from 6.8% to 3.8%. Also, median household income has been rising. The median household income was $39,205 in 1999, but had increased to $59,603 in 2016.

Market valuation in Stillwater County increased from $821,024,689 in 2004 to $1,697,749,146 in 2017. A slight decrease is shown in 2014 reflecting a still recovering national econmy.Market values are shown by elementary school districts from 2004 to 2017 in the following table.

Stillwater County Market Values by Elementary School District

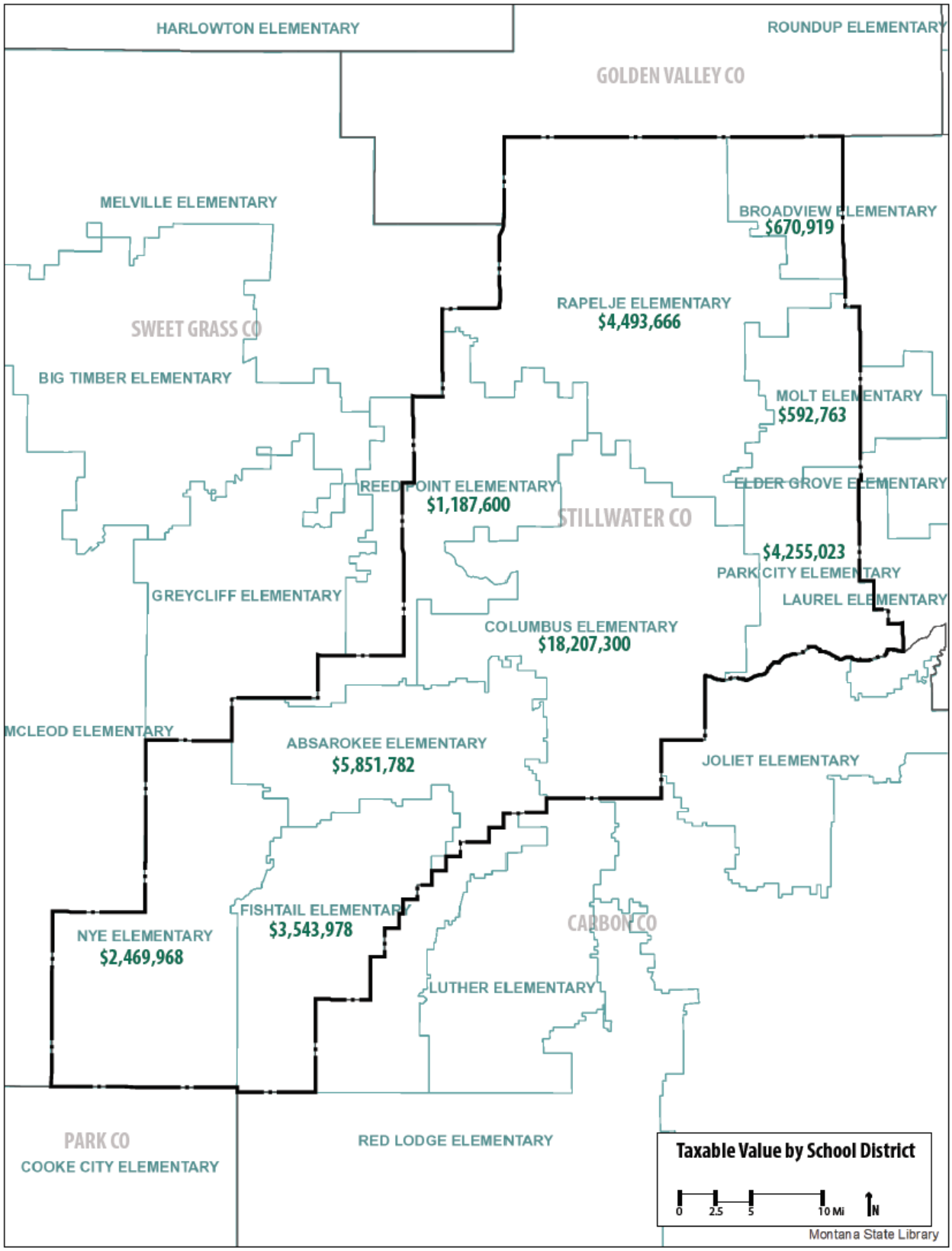
	2004	2014	2017
Absarokee	$206,534,177	$227,271,839	$300,114,444
Broadview	$11,906,201	$12,859,171	$13,452,061
Columbus	$374,123,898	$580,072,916	$796,206,512
Fishtail	$38,761,227	$49,742,147	$106,441,035
Molt	$12,156,265	$11,574,659	$19,871,328
Nye	$35,689,195	$107,783,424	$122,994,572
Park City	$63,915,419	$99,031,541	$216,680,788
Rapelje	$54,710,683	$51,561,142	$73,143,881
Reed Point	$23,227,625	$28,159,884	$49,118,371
Stillwater County	$821,024,689	$778,991,264	$1,697,749,146
Town of Columbus	$193,848,643	$253,532,504	$312,449,179

Taxable valuation in Stillwater County increased from $30,398,001 in 2004 to $41,267,923 in 2017. Trends in taxable values are shown by elementary school districts in the following table.

Stillwater County Taxable Values by Elementary School District

	2004	2014	2017
Absarokee	$6,697,880	$6,595,518	$5,851,782
Broadview	$778,591	$623,806	$670,919
Columbus	$12,318,877	$17,119,695	$18,207,300
Fishtail	$1,507,535	$1,715,212	$3,543,978
Molt	$543,660	$449,207	$592,765
Nye	$1,187,848	$1,187,848	$2,469,968
Park City	$2,728,076	$2,491,508	$4,225,023
Rapelje	$3,719,850	$3,393,785	$4,493,666
Reed Point	$915,685	$970,927	$1,187,600
Stillwater County	$30,398,001	$36,702,861	41,267,923
City of Columbus	$6,234,112	$7,425,077	7,180,545

The following map shows the 2003-04 taxable value by elementary school district in the County.


HARLOWTON ELEMENTARY
ROUNDUP ELEMENTARY
GOLDEN VALLEY CO
MELVILLE ELEMENTARY
BROADVIEW ELEMENTARY
$670,919
RAPELJE ELEMENTARY
$4,493,666
SWEET GRASS CO
BIG TIMBER ELEMENTARY
MOLT ELEMENTARY
$592,763
REED POINT ELEMENTARY
$1,187,600
ELDER GROVE ELEMENTARY
STILLWATER CO
$4,255,023
PARK CITY ELEMENTARY
GREYCLIFF ELEMENTARY
LAUREL ELEMENTARY
COLUMBUS ELEMENTARY
$18,207,300
MCLEOD ELEMENTARY
ABSAROKEE ELEMENTARY
$5,851,782
JOLIET ELEMENTARY
FISHTAIL ELEMENTARY
$3,543,978
CARBON CO
NYE ELEMENTARY
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PARK CO
COOKE CITY ELEMENTARY
RED LODGE ELEMENTARY
Taxable Value by School District
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The graph below shows the trends in school enrollment. Since 2003-2004, the trend has varied by district. Columbus has seen an increase in enrollment, especially at the elementary school, while Absarokee, Rapelje, and Reed Point have seen decreased enrollments. Park City has remained relatively consistent, as have the smaller schools in Fishtail, Molt, and Nye.

Stillwater County - School Enrollment

	2003-2004	2013-2014	2016-2017
Absarokee Elementary	186	123	119
Absarokee 7-8	55	50	31
Absarokee High School	117	76	85
total	358	249	235
Columbus Elementary	261	324	341
Columbus Middle School	182	166	162
High School	197	198	196
total	640	688	699
Fishtail Elementary	7	2	7
Molt Elementary	8	4	6
Nye Elementary	4	7	6
Park City Elementary	166	195	164
Park City 7-8	62	43	45
Park City High School	87	95	96
total	315	333	305
Rapelje Elementary	35	28	28
Rapelje 7-8	14	9	7
Rapelje High School	27	12	17
total	76	49	52
Reed Point Elementary	46	37	41
Reed Point 7-8	18	12	12
Reed Point High School	36	27	23
total	100	76	76
TOTAL	1,508	1,408	1,386

Other local services have also been improving over time. Those services include medical services with more advanced technology and telecommunications; fire protection through additional training, new facilities and equipment; and improvement in facilities and services provided by other special districts.

5.5 NATURAL RESOURCES:

Weather

Natural resource trends include information indicating the mean annual precipitation has been below average and the mean annual temperatures have been above average for the past five years. Severe storms are not common; however, thunderstorms, hailstorms, high winds, heavy snow, freezing rain and sleet do occur. Available wind information indicates wind gusts in excess of 60 mph are not uncommon. Snow load ratings for roofs range from 30 in Columbus, Reed Point, Park City and the northern part of the county, 35 for the Absarokee area, and 85 for southern Stillwater County. The trend of variable weather conditions is expected to continue.

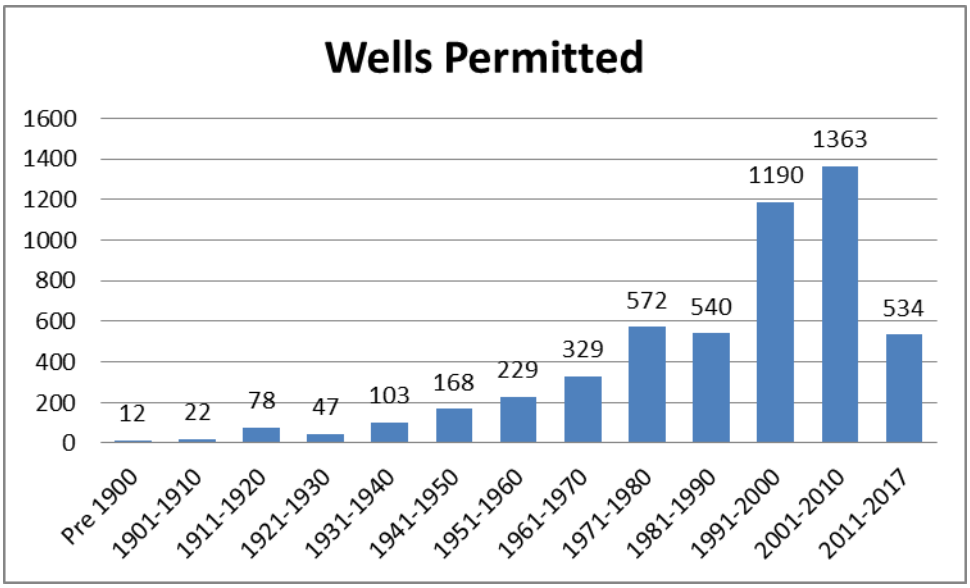
Flooding

Heavy spring rains in conjunction with snowmelt runoff have caused major floods in the county. Stillwater County has adopted a complete set of regulations pertaining to construction within the limits of the 100 year floodplain. Flood Boundary Maps show the limit of the 100 year floodplain. Ice jams also occur at random sites with no predictable pattern during winter and early spring. The trend of periodic flooding is expected to continue.

Ground water

High water table conditions occur in the Reed Point area south of the river, southeast of Park City, east of Columbus, along the Stillwater River between Columbus and Absarokee, south of Absarokee along Rosebud Creek, in the Fishtail area, in the Nye area, and in the West Fork drainage. High water table conditions can be influenced by irrigation practices, which are seasonal. These trends are expected to continue.

Water well activity was very high from 1991-2010, with nearly 2,500 wells drilled during that 20-year period. However, this trend appears to be slowing, as just over 500 wells were drilled from 2011-2017. The following graph shows the number of water wells permitted over time in Stillwater County.

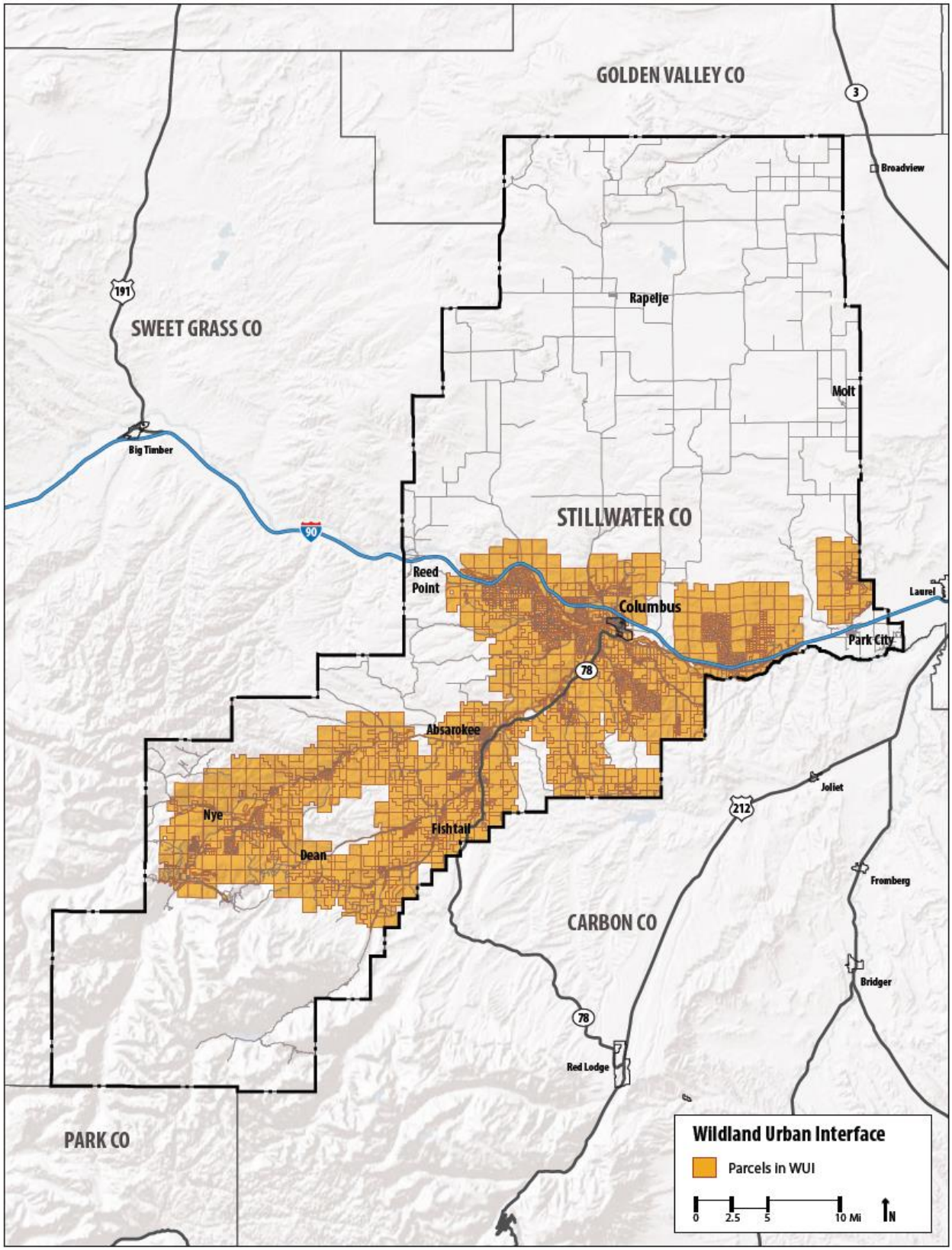


Wind Energy Development

Stillwater County has experienced a significant amount of interest in the development of wind farms to take advantage of wind resources generally located in the northwest portion of the County. Stillwater Wind LLC began developing an 80 MW wind farm north of Reed Point in 2018. The trend of wind energy development is expected to continue.

Fire Hazards

Vegetation type and degree of slope are the main factors in determining natural fire hazards, along with weather conditions. The steeper forested slopes in the Beartooth Mountains, eroded uplands along the Yellowstone and Stillwater River valleys present a higher potential for wildland fires. Riparian zones, wetlands, cultivated pastures and the urban area are considered low natural fire hazard areas. Lightning/thunderstorms are relatively common in the county and are a natural cause of wildfires. These trends are expected to continue.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STILLWATER CO
Reed Point
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CARBON CO
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CHAPTER 6: GOALS and OBJECTIVES

6.1 OVERALL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives for the County were developed throughout the development of this document. The purpose of identifying these goals were to give concrete, measurable objectives for planning activity over the life of this Growth Policy, including identifying target dates for activities necessary to implement these goals and objectives. In developing these goals and objectives, public input and survey responses were collected and considered by the County Planning Board, which prioritized the goals. The County Commissioners were also involved through the development of these goals and objectives and exercised final approval of the below list. Commission involvement will be necessary throughout the implementation of these goals and objectives as approval, adoption, and funding of various policies necessitates.

Goal	Objective	Implementation Strategy
Streamline Phasing Process for Subdivisions	Allow Larger Developments to Develop Over Time	Revise Subdivision Regulations to Reflect Phasing Language in State Law (2019-2020)
Provide Opportunities for Greater Public Involvement in Wind Energy Development Project	Create Regulatory Framework for Review of Wind Energy Developments	Investigate Regulatory Options and Authority (2019)
Determine Whether or Not County Should Seek to Implement Zoning	Know Benefits and Risks of Zoning Understand Types of Zoning Understand What Can and Cannot be Regulated by Zoning	Investigate Regulatory Authority (2019) Compile Options for Further Discussion (2019-2020)
Provide Education on Planning Issues	Encourage Deeper Discussion and Greater Understanding of Issues by Public and Decision Makers	Invite Speakers to Planning Board Meetings for Education/Training (Ongoing, as Schedule Permits)

Facilitate Growth North of Interstate in Park City	Extend Park City Sewer North of Interstate	Research Grant Opportunities (2019) Preliminary Engineering Report (2019-2020) Acquire Funding (2021) Construction (2022-????)
Fund Sidewalk Maintenance and construction in Unincorporated Areas	Create Sidewalk Districts where Needed	Evaluate Process (2019) Identify Areas Where Needed (2019-2020) Identify and secure grants (Ongoing) Create Districts if needed(2020-2021)
Facilitate Small Business Development and Retention	Provide Training, Reduce Regulatory Barriers	Work with ED Department for Business and Workforce Training (Ongoing) Evaluate Regulatory Documents to Reduce Unnecessary Burdens on Business (Ongoing)
Consolidate County Buildings to Provide Centralized Services and Reduce Overhead	Develop Facilities Plan for the County	Create and Advertise RFP (2019) Hire Firm and Begin Study (2019-2020) Finish Study and Evaluate Results (2020) Secure Funding and Implement Plan (2020-????)

6.2. RECOMMENDATION FOR NEIGHBORHOOD PLANS

Statutory authority for neighborhood plans is Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 76-1-601 (4) which specifies a growth policy may include one or more neighborhood plans. A neighborhood plan must be consistent with the growth policy. Neighborhood plans are being recommended as possible future addendums to this growth policy. Because of the diversity of Stillwater County, a variety of community-specific issues are present. Neighborhood plans would allow the County to conduct deeper, more detailed plans for smaller areas of the County.

Minimum criteria defining the jurisdictional area for a neighborhood plan must be established. It is recommended the elementary school district boundaries established within Stillwater County be used to define the jurisdictional area for neighborhood plans.

Each future neighborhood plan must address the subdivision review criteria in MCA 76-3-608(3)(a); the definitions and review criteria included in this growth policy are recommended for inclusion in future neighborhood plans to evaluate the effect of subdivision on the agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, local services, natural environment, wildlife, wildlife habitat, public health and safety; describe any zoning regulations that will be implemented to address these criteria; and identify geographic areas where the governing body intends to authorize an exemption from review of the criteria for proposed subdivisions.

6.3 PLANNING DOCUMENT SCHEDULE

In addition to the goals and objectives outlined above, there are several documents either traditionally written by or under the direction of the County's planning staff, and/or required by state law. An update schedule for these documents is outlined below.

Document	Priority	In House or Outsource?	Required in Statute	Timeframe
Growth Policy	High	Either	Optional in statute, but necessary to undertake many planning activities	Revise every five to ten years; Review in 2023
Subdivision Regulations	High	In House	Yes	Review/revise every two years; Next in 2019
Capital Improvements Plan	High	Outsource	No	Update every ten years; Need ASAP; Last in 2008
Facilities Plan	Medium	Outsource	No	Update as needed; Need ASAP
Comprehensive Parks Plan	Low	In House	Yes, to expend cash-in-lieu of parkland	Update as needed; Last in 2009
Neighborhood Plan(s)	As need identified	In House	Optional, would be amended into Growth Policy	When need is identified

CHAPTER 7: IMPLEMENTATION of GROWTH POLICY

7.1 POLICIES, REGULATIONS, and IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

This section includes a description of policies, regulations and other measures to achieve the community goals and objectives stated in Chapter 3 of this Stillwater County Growth Policy as required by 76-1-601 (2)(d), MCA.

MCA refers to Montana Codes Annotated, ARM refers to Administrative Rules of Montana, and CFR refers to the Code of Federal Regulations.

7.1.1 County Planning **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 6)**

The governing body of Stillwater County has created a County Planning Board to promote orderly development. The jurisdictional area includes all of Stillwater County except the incorporated limits of the Town of Columbus and adjoining areas of the County south of the Interstate 90 right-of-way, north of the Yellowstone River, east of State Secondary Highway 306 (Rapelje Road), and west of the section line between Sections 22 and 23, 26 and 27, T2S, R23E, M.P.M.

The County Planning Board is advisory to the Board of County Commissioners in proposing a growth policy, policies for subdivision plats, layout and development of public infrastructure, and utilities to platted and unplatted lands.

7.1.2 Open Meetings **(MCA Title 2, Chapter 3, Part 2)**

Public boards, commissions, councils, and other public agencies in the Town of Columbus and Stillwater County conduct public business, actions, and deliberations openly. All meetings of the governing bodies, boards, bureaus, commissions, agencies, or any political subdivision or organizations or agencies supported in whole or in part by public funds or expending public funds are open to the public.

All meetings that regulate the rights, duties, or privileges of any individual are open to the public. Provided, however, the presiding officer of any meeting may close the meeting during the time the discussion relates to a matter of individual privacy and then only if the presiding officer determines that the demands of individual privacy clearly exceed the merits of public disclosure. The right of individual privacy may be waived by the individual about whom the discussion pertains and, in that event, the meeting must be open. A meeting may be closed when an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public agency.

7.1.3 Right to Farm **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 2, Part 9)**

Agricultural activities are protected from governmental zoning and nuisance ordinances. A city, county, taxing district or other political subdivision may not adopt an ordinance or resolution that prohibits any existing agricultural activities or forces the termination of any existing agricultural activities.

Stillwater County has not adopted and does not intend to adopt an ordinance or resolution that prohibits any existing agricultural activities or forces the termination of any existing agricultural activities.

7.1.4 Neighborhood Plans **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 1, Part 6)**

Neighborhood plans, consistent with the County's growth policy, may be approved and included in the growth policy as an addendum. The jurisdictional area for a neighborhood plan will be a census-designated place or an area equivalent to the portion of an elementary school district within Stillwater County. Neighborhood plans will address the primary review criteria outlined in 76-3-608(3) (a), MCA; evaluate the effect of subdivision on the criteria; describe zoning regulations or other conditions of approval that will be implemented to address the criteria; and identify geographic areas where the governing body intends to authorize an exemption from review of the criteria in 76-3-608 (3)(a), MCA, for proposed subdivisions.

All neighborhood plans are intended to achieve community goals and objectives.

7.1.5 Local Government Budgeting **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 6, Part 40)**

Local government budgets conform to the fund structure prescribed by the Montana Department of Administration. Local governments submit a complete copy of the final budget together with a statement of tax levies to the Montana Department of Administration by the later of October 1 or 60 days after receipt of taxable values from the Montana Department of Revenue.

Stillwater County and the Town of Columbus prepare an annual budget that includes funding for local services and public facilities necessary to achieve community goals and objectives.

7.1.6 Capital Improvements **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 6, Part 6)**

Local governments may provide a capital improvement fund for the replacement, improvement, and acquisition of property, facilities, or equipment that costs in excess of $5,000 and that has a life expectancy of five years or more. This capital improvement fund must be formally adopted by the governing body. Stillwater County has not

formally adopted a capital improvement program at this time. Capital improvement funds are approved during the annual budget process.

Montana Public Works Standard Specifications, including those for county roads and bridges, are used as a guideline on public works projects. Other applicable county policies, regulations and other lawful measures are implemented to achieve community goals and objectives until a capital improvement program is adopted.

7.1.7 Subdivision Regulations **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 3, Parts 1 through 6)**

The governing bodies of Stillwater County and the town of Columbus have adopted subdivision regulations to promote public health, safety, and general welfare by regulating the subdivision of land; preventing overcrowding; lessening congestion on streets and highways; providing for adequate light, air, water supply, sewage disposal, parks and recreation, ingress and egress, and other public requirements; requiring development in harmony with the natural environment; protecting the rights of property owners; and requiring uniform monumentation of land subdivisions by reference to a plat or certificate of survey.

Subdivision regulations for Stillwater County and the Town of Columbus contain general provisions; procedures for major and minor subdivisions; design and improvement standards; procedures and standards for subdivisions created by rent or lease, condominiums, and planned unit developments; administrative provisions; and other requirements. The subdivision regulations are amended periodically to stay current with statutory amendments, Attorney General Opinions, or other relevant changes.

7.1.8 Sanitation in Subdivisions **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 4, Part 1)** Subdivision Regulations **(ARM Title 17, Chapter 36)**

Sanitation in subdivisions and associated rules and regulations has been adopted to control water supply, sewage disposal, and solid waste disposal. These include measures designed to protect individual wells potentially affected by adjoining sewage disposal and individual sewage systems; to protect the quality and potability of water for public water supplies and domestic uses; and to protect the quality of water for other beneficial uses.

A Board of Health has been established in accordance with 50-2-104, MCA, to oversee environmental health issues in the County. The Board of Health has adopted rules for on-site subsurface sewage treatment systems.

In addition, circulars published by Montana Department of Environmental Quality provide implementation guidance. These include DEQ 1 – Standards for Water Works, DEQ 2 – Design Standards for Wastewater Facilities, DEQ 3 – Standards for Small Water Systems, DEQ 4 – Montana Standards for On-Site Subsurface Sewage Treatment Systems, DEQ 8 – Montana Standards for Subdivision Storm Drainage, DEQ 11 – Montana Standards for Development of Springs for Individual and shared Non-Public

Systems, DEQ 17 – Montana Standards for Cisterns for Individual Non-Public Systems, PWS 5 – Groundwater under the Direct Influence of Surface Water, PWS 6 – Source Water Protection Delineation, and WQB 7 – Montana Numeric Water Quality Standards.

7.1.9 Surveys and Coordinates Corner Recordation Requirements **(MCA Title 70, Chapter 22, Parts 1 and 2) and** Survey Monumentation Standards **(ARM Chapter 24, Title 183)**

The purpose of these regulations is to protect and perpetuate public land survey corners and information concerning the location of these corners by requiring the systematic establishment of monuments and recording of information concerning the location of public land survey corners. The regulations also allow for the location of other property corners and providing for property security and a coherent system of property location and identification of ownership, thereby eliminating the repeated necessity for reestablishment and relocations of corners once they are established and located.

These records are maintained by the County Clerk and Recorder.

7.1.10 Airport Regulations **(MCA Title 67, Chapters 4-6, and 14 CFR 77)**

Airport approach, transitional, horizontal, and conical zones have been established with specified height limitations. Permitted uses on airport property are specified along with nonconforming uses and structures. Permits for future uses are also specified in accordance with regulations administered by the Federal Aviation Administration.

An airport layout plan and airspace plan have been prepared and existing obstructions have been identified. An airport influence area has been defined and prohibits uses not compatible with airport activity and expansion (such as a nursing home in the approach/departure zone.)

The Airport Board has established rules for operation and management of the airport. These rules address confinement of aircraft operations; traffic patterns; taxiing; aircraft safety, reports and accidents; fuelling and defuelling of aircraft; vehicular traffic; commercial operations; snow removal and mowing plan; airport management; lease or use agreement; hangars; airport hazard areas; through the fence access; revision of the regulations; grievance procedures; and penalty for violations.

7.1.11 Floodplain Regulations **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 5, Parts 1 through 11)**

Federal Floodplain Regulations **(44 CFR, Chapter 1, Parts 63-73)**

Recurrent flooding of land resources causes loss of life, damage to property, disruption of commerce and governmental services, and unsanitary conditions. These are all detrimental to the health, safety, welfare, and property of the occupants of flooded lands and the people of this state. It is in the public interest to manage regulation of flood-prone lands and waters in a manner consistent with sound land and water use management practices which will prevent and alleviate flooding threats to life and health and reduce private and public economic losses. Stillwater County may require cross section analysis of streams by an appropriate professional to determine current flood plain delineation.

Stillwater County has adopted floodplain regulations by resolution and the Town of Columbus has adopted floodplain regulations by ordinance. Floodplain regulations are amended periodically to stay current with statutory amendments, Attorney General opinions, or other relevant changes.

7.1.12 Economic Development **(MCA Title 90, Chapter 1, Part 1) and (13CFR 302)**

Counties can participate in economic development and tourism programs for the purpose of promoting, developing and advancing the economic welfare of the State.

Stillwater County participates in the Beartooth RC&D Economic Development District with representatives on the Board of Directors and the District Economic Development Committee. A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy was adopted in 2001.

7.1.13 Hard Rock Mining Impact Act **(MCA Title 90, Chapter 6, Part 3) and** Hard Rock Mining Impact Rules **(ARM 8.104.101 through 218)**

A Hard Rock Mining Impact Plan was prepared by Stillwater County and approved to assist Stillwater County and the Town of Columbus in meeting the initial financial impact of large-scale mineral development. The impact plan includes estimates of the number of persons coming into the impacted area; increased capital and operating cost to local government units for providing services expected as a result of the development; and the financial or other assistance the mineral developer will provide affected local government units to meet the need for services.

Stillwater County, the Town of Columbus, and Columbus schools are identified as affected units of local government in the 1998 Hard Rock Mining Impact Plan Amendment for the Nye expansion project. Stillwater County and other units of local government are identified as potentially affected in the 1998 Hard Rock Mining Impact Plan Amendment for the East Boulder Project.

Stillwater County and other affected units of local government are subject to the rules, policies, and guidelines established by the Hard Rock Mining Impact Board and terms of the approved impact plans.

7.1.14 Property Tax Base Sharing **(MCA Title 90, Chapter 6, Part3)**

The increase in property tax base resulting from the development and operation of large-scale mines is allocated so that property tax revenues are equitably distributed among affected local government units. Employee surveys provided in accordance with 90-6-405, MCA, are utilized for the annual allocation of the increase in taxable valuation from a large-scale mineral development.

Stillwater County, the Town of Columbus, and other affected units of local government follow the procedures specified in the 1998 Hard Rock Mining Impact Plan Amendment for the Stillwater Mine at Nye.

7.1.15 Metal Mines License Tax **(MCA Title, 37, Part 1; Title 7, Chapter 6, Part 22; and Title 20, Chapter 9, Part 2)**

Stillwater County has established a hard-rock mine trust reserve account and a metal mines tax reserve account as authorized. The Columbus School District has also established a metal mines tax fund. The allocation of metal mines license tax revenues received is allocated by the Stillwater Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) annually in compliance with state statutes. The hard-rock mine trust account can only be used following a mine closure or a 50% reduction in mine workforce. The County's metal mines tax can be expended for planning and economic development activities. Schools can expend metal mines tax reserve for any purpose authorized by law.

7.1.16 School Districts **(MCA Title 20,Chapter 6,Parts 1 through 7)**

State statutes provide for school districts to provide public educational services under the jurisdiction of the district. An elementary district is a district organized for the purpose of providing public education for all grades up to and including grade 8 and for preschool programs and kindergartens. A high school district is a district organized for the purpose of providing those public educational services for all grades beyond grade 8, including postsecondary programs, except those programs administered by community college districts or the Montana university system. The trustees of elementary districts and high school districts have powers, duties, and responsibilities authorized and imposed by Montana statues.

There are portions of nine elementary and six high school districts within the county planning jurisdiction. The school districts implement their own policies.

The funding program for the districts in the state is financed by a combination of county equalization money, state equalization aid, appropriations for special education, a district

levy, for support of a school not approved as an isolated school under the provisions of MCA 20-9-302; and district levies or other revenue, as provided by MCA 20-9-308 and 20-9-353.

7.1.17 Rural Fire Districts **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 33, Part 21)**

The board of county commissioners is authorized to establish fire districts in any unincorporated territory or town upon presentation of a petition in writing signed by the owners of 50% or more of the area of the privately owned lands included within the proposed district who constitute a majority of the taxpayers who are freeholders of the area.

Absarokee, Columbus, Park City, and a portion of Broadview have fire districts within the Stillwater County planning jurisdiction. These fire districts implement the goals and objectives identified for fire prevention and control.

7.1.19 Rural Improvement Districts **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 12, Parts 21-42)**

Whenever the public interest or convenience may require, the Board of County Commissioners is authorized and empowered to create special improvement districts outside of the limits of incorporated towns for the purpose of building, constructing, or acquiring by purchase one or more of the improvements for the benefit of the special improvement district. When there has been or shall be created a rural improvement district, according to the provisions of Part 21, for the purpose of securing a lighting system for the rural improvement district, the Board of County Commissioners may enter into a contract with other persons or corporations for the purpose of furnishing light to said rural improvement district.

There are currently light districts in Absarokee, Park City and Reed Point. There are also two rural special improvement districts in Absarokee for sewer purposes that may be transferred to the Absarokee water and sewer district in the future. Rural special improvement districts implement the goals and objectives identified for town sites and public facilities in cooperation with the county.

7.1.20 Weed Control District **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 22, Part 21)**

A weed management district has been formed by the county and includes all the land within the boundaries of the county. The county commissioners have appointed a district weed board that provides a coordinator and other employees to purchase chemicals, materials, and equipment and other operational costs necessary for implementing an effective noxious weed management program.

The noxious weed management program is based on a plan approved by the board. The noxious weed management plan specifies the goals and priorities of the program;

identifies the distribution and abundance of each noxious weed species known to occur within the district and specify the locations of new infestations and areas particularly susceptible to new infestations; specifies pesticide management goals and procedures, including but not limited to water quality protection, public and worker safety, equipment selection and maintenance, and pesticide selection, application, mixing, loading, storage, and disposal; and estimates the personnel, operations, and equipment costs of the proposed program.

The weed district provides for the management of noxious weeds on all land or rights-of-way owned or controlled by the county within the district. Methods for such control shall include cultural, chemical, and biological methods. Noxious weeds are not permitted to propagate or go to seed. Compliance with the noxious weed management program is implemented through noxious weed management agreements.

For new subdivisions, noxious weed management provisions are included in the Subdivision Improvements Agreement signed by both the County and the developer.

When property is offered for sale, the person who owns the property shall notify the owner's agent and the purchaser of the existence or potential existence of noxious weeds on the property offered for sale.

7.1.21 Water and Sewer Districts **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 13, Part 22 through 23)**

Three county water and sewer districts have been organized and incorporated and managed as provided by state statute for Absarokee, Park City and Reed Point. The districts may construct, purchase, lease, or otherwise acquire, operate and maintain water rights, waterworks, sanitary sewer works, storm sewer works, canals, conduits, reservoirs, lands, and rights useful or necessary to store, conserve, supply, produce, convey, or drain water or sewage for purposes beneficial to the district.

Water and sewer districts can also prevent interference with or diminution of the natural flow of any stream or natural subterranean supply of water that is used or useful for any purpose of the district or that is a common benefit to the lands within the district; sell water or the use of water for household, domestic, or other similar purposes; sell sewer service, and, whenever there is a surplus of water or sewer works capacity, sell or otherwise dispose of the water or sewer works capacity to consumers located within or outside of the boundaries of the district; retain the services of architects and engineers for designing, preparing a feasibility study for, and drawing plans and specifications for a water or sewer system for the district; and establish, by ordinance or resolution, rules and regulations for the operation, maintenance, use, and availability of any of the district's systems or improvements, including but not limited to connection procedures, service termination, and the payment of rates and charges, including penalties and interest charges for delinquent accounts.

Each water and sewer district has a board of directors who are either elected or appointed by the Stillwater BOCC to serve the district. Water and sewer districts implement the

goals and objectives identified for town sites and public facilities in cooperation with the county.

7.1.22 Cemetery Districts **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 35, Part 21)**

Cemetery districts may be created by petition when presented to the board of county commissioners of the county signed by not less than 20% of the citizens who are owners of land located within a proposed cemetery district, describe the boundaries of the proposed district and request that the territory within these boundaries be organized into a public cemetery district.

A cemetery district may contain the entire territory embraced within a county or any portion or subdivision thereof. The cemetery district must be governed and managed by trustees appointed by the board of county commissioners. In addition to the powers and duties established in the resolution creating a cemetery district, the district may maintain a cemetery or cemeteries within the district; hold title to property by grant, gift, devise, lease, or any other method; and perform other duties including the selling or leasing of burial lots.

There are currently three cemetery districts in Stillwater County. The Park City, Rapelje, and Rosebud Cemetery Districts. Cemetery districts help implement the goals and objectives identified for town sites in cooperation with the county.

7.1.23 Conservation Districts **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 15, Parts 1 through 10)**

State statutes provide for the creation of conservation districts. They are created for the conservation of soil and soil resources; for the control and prevention of soil erosion; the prevention of floodwater and sediment damages; and furthering the conservation, development, utilization, and disposal of water. The districts serve to preserve natural resources, control floods, prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs, preserve wildlife, protect the tax base, protect public lands, and protect and promote the health, safety, and general welfare.

The county planning jurisdiction is within the Stillwater Conservation District.

7.1.24 Conservation Easements **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 6, Part 2)**

State statutes authorize public bodies and certain qualifying private organizations to voluntarily provide for the preservation of native plants or animals; biotic communities; geological or geographical formations of scientific, aesthetic, or educational interest; provide for the preservation of other significant open-space land either in perpetuity or for a term of years; and encourage private participation in such a program. Any qualified private organization may acquire a conservation easement, by purchase, by gift, devise,

bequest, or grant title to any interest or interests in rights in real property, including land and water.

In order to minimize conflict with local comprehensive planning, all conservation easements are subject to review prior to recording by the appropriate local planning authority for the county within which the land lies. It shall be the responsibility of the entity acquiring the conservation easement to present the proposed conveyance of the conservation easement to the planning board to review and to comment upon the relationship of the proposed conveyance to comprehensive planning for the area. Such comments will not be binding on the proposed grantor or grantee but shall be advisory in nature. All conservation easements are recorded in the County where the land lies so as to affect their titles in the manner of other conveyances of interest in land and shall describe the land subject to the conservation easement by adequate legal description or by reference to a recorded plat showing its boundaries.

7.1.25 County Planning and Zoning **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 2, Part 1)**

State statutes allow citizens to petition the County governing body to create planning and zoning districts for the purpose of furthering the health, safety, and general welfare of the people of the County. This process is called citizen petitioned, or Part 1, zoning.

Planning and zoning districts or regulations adopted under this part cannot regulate lands used for grazing, horticulture, agriculture, or the growing of timber.

Stillwater County has one citizen petitioned (Part 1) planning and zoning district, the West Fork Stillwater Planning and Zoning District.

7.1.26 County Zoning **(MCA Title 76, Chapter 2, Part 2)**

State statutes also authorize the Board of County Commissioners to adopt zoning regulations for all or part of the jurisdiction for the purpose of promoting the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare. This is called county initiated, or Part 2, zoning. Zoning districts can be used to specify future uses of the land or buildings, height and bulk of future buildings, area of yards and other open spaces, building setback lines, and other development allowed within the districts. The County zoning commission, can authorize and provide for the issuance of permits as a prerequisite to construction, alteration, or enlargement of any building or structure. Zoning regulations must be made with reasonable consideration, among other things, to the character of the district and its peculiar suitability for particular uses and with a view to conserving the value of buildings and encouraging the most appropriate use of land throughout the jurisdictional area.

Regulations must be made in accordance with the growth policy and be designed to lessen congestion in the streets; secure safety from fire, panic, and other dangers; promote public health and general welfare; provide adequate light and air; prevent the overcrowding of land; avoid undue concentration of population; and facilitate the

adequate provision of transportation, water, sewerage, schools, parks, and other public requirements. A resolution or rule adopted under the provisions of this part may not prevent the complete use, development, or recovery of any mineral, forest, or agricultural resources by the owner.

7.1.27 Interim Zoning

Interim zoning, as an emergency measure, is also authorized under Part 2. The Stillwater BOCC may adopt an interim zoning map or regulation as an emergency measure in order to promote public health, safety, morals, and general welfare if the purpose of the interim zoning map or regulation is to classify and regulate those uses and related matters that constitute the emergency.

7.1.29 Stillwater County Policies **(MCA Title 7, Chapter 5, Part 21)**

Stillwater County policies are adopted by resolution and are referenced in the minutes of the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC). Policies on appointed boards address the County Board of Health, Cemetery Board, County Tax Appeal Board, County Planning Board, City-County Planning Board, Five County Economic District, Solid Waste Board, Library Board, and the County Commissioner's office and meeting hours. Policies on fees address fees for road abandonment, road approaches, utility easements, road encroachment, road cut, solid waste rates, Treasurer's Office, Clerk and Recorder's Office, Sheriff's Office and daily confinement, and fairground use. Financial policies address budgeting, collateral checking and deposits of public money, expenditure of forest reserve funds, expenditure of gasoline and vehicle fuels tax, investments, expenditure of federal payments in lieu of taxes, purchasing equipment, tax refunds, governing fixed assets, county land planning funds, payroll and insurance, mileage, purchasing and processing claims, local option vehicle tax and credit card use. Personnel policies relate to a variety of personnel issues. Public safety policies address drug-free work place, floodplains, inspections, open burning, food and beverage sanitation requirements, nudity, weapons in the county courthouse, smoking in the county courthouse, fair housing, and fire seasons. Roads and bridge policies address road abandonment, car gates (cattle guards), road approaches, bridges, culverts, road encroachments, new roads, public functions and street closures, road dedication, road maintenance, road cuts, rights-of-way, snow removal, utility easements, aircraft takeoffs and landing on public roads, speed limits on county roads, names for county roads, cattle guards, mailboxes, road permits, weight limits, and parking restrictions. Miscellaneous policies address hard rock mining impacts, junk vehicles recycling and disposal, public library, mental health, Absarokee sewer district, and solid waste. Contracted services policies address architectural, engineering and land surveying services. There is also a policy on contracts. Public Nuisance policies address weed equipment, chemicals, and other weed policies; mosquito control; dog control; and predatory animal control.

Land use planning policies include certificate of survey, parks and playgrounds, subdivisions; subdivisions conform to the Columbus Growth Policy, and evasion of the Subdivision and Platting Act.

Stillwater County utilizes County policies, regulations and other lawful measures to achieve the community goals and objectives. County policies are updated as needed.

7.1.30 Other Measures **(Montana Constitution, Montana Codes Annotated and Administrative Rules of Montana)**

In addition to the implementation measures described above; the Stillwater County Commission may utilize other implementation measures authorized by the Montana Constitution, Montana Code Annotated, Administrative Rules of Montana, and local regulations as needed to achieve the goals and objectives identified in the Growth Policy.

7.2 PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY

The strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure for Stillwater County includes utilizing available planning, programming, budgeting, and accounting options allowed by law for drinking water systems, wastewater treatment facilities, sewer systems, solid waste facilities, fire protection facilities, roads, bridges, and other public infrastructure.

7.2.1 Stillwater County

Stillwater County has developed roads and bridges; water and sewer systems, a solid waste system; and public buildings, facilities, and equipment within the county's jurisdiction. Additional development of public infrastructure is addressed through capital improvement planning, subdivision improvements agreements, water and sewer districts, or other special districts. Replacement of public infrastructure is accomplished through the annual budgeting process utilizing fees, revenue bonds, grants, or other available funding options. Maintenance of public infrastructure is also addressed in the annual budgeting process including setting fees, mill levies, and utilizing non-tax revenue to fund ongoing maintenance costs.

The County's strategy for development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure is based on needs assessments, facility studies, economic development plans, growth policies, or other relevant information. The Stillwater BOCC evaluates and prioritizes requests for public infrastructure development, maintenance, and replacement received from County departments during their budgeting process in accordance with the Local Government Budget Act and other applicable laws. Public health and safety; Federal, State and local standards; costs and availability of funding are considered in the evaluation of each capital improvement project. Debt use is limited to long-term public infrastructure. The County utilizes Federal and State grants when possible. Other Districts and jurisdictions within Stillwater County are also responsible for public infrastructure.

7.2.2 Other Districts and Jurisdictions

The County strategy in relation to the development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure controlled by other districts or jurisdictions within the County planning jurisdiction is to encourage unincorporated towns to manage their public infrastructure, including road development, through special districts to the extent possible.

The three water and sewer districts in Absarokee, Park City, and Reed Point own, operate, and maintain public water or sewer systems. Two rural special improvement districts (RSID 5 and 7) operate and maintain the Absarokee sewer system. There are four fire districts (Absarokee, Broadview, Columbus, and Park City) that own public buildings and equipment. In addition there is a Fire Department in Columbus and volunteer departments at Molt, Rapelje, Reed Point, and Nye. The three cemetery districts at Rapelje, Rosebud (Absarokee), and Park City, own, operate, and maintain public facilities. There are light districts in Park City, Absarokee, and Reedpoint. The Beartooth Park and Recreation District was formed in 2003 and is responsible for public park and recreation facilities in southern Stillwater County.

There is also a joint City-County Airport Board, County Library Board; County Solid Waste District; County Weed Board; Stillwater Community Hospital Board; and Stillwater Conservation District that have public infrastructure development, maintenance, and replacement responsibilities. In addition, there are nine elementary school districts (Absarokee, Broadview, Columbus, Fishtail, Molt, Nye, Park City, Rapelje, and Reed Point). There are six high school districts (Absarokee, Broadview, Columbus, Park City, Rapelje, and Reed Point).

7.2.3 State of Montana

The Montana Department of Transportation is responsible for the development, maintenance, and replacement of Interstate 90 and the frontage road (Old Highway 10), Montana primary Highway 78 (Donald M. Ruhl Memorial Highway), secondary Highway 302 (Molt Road), secondary Highway 306 (Rapelje Road), secondary Highway 419 (Nye Road), secondary Highway 420 (Stillwater Road), secondary Highway 421 (Joliet Road), off system bridges, and other property within the County planning jurisdiction.

The County strategy in relation to the development, maintenance, and replacement of public infrastructure controlled by the State of Montana is to communicate local community needs, issues, and concerns; participate in State planning and programming of State public infrastructure; and coordinate and cooperate on State highway, bridge, or other projects.

7.3 IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Section 76-1-601(2)(f), MCA, requires an implementation strategy that includes a timetable for implementing a Growth Policy; lists conditions that will lead to the revision of the growth policy; and a timetable for reviewing the Growth Policy at least every five years.

7.3.1 Timetable for implementing the growth policy

Implementation of the Growth Policy will begin after adoption by the Stillwater Commission, and, will remain in effect until it is revised or repealed. The Stillwater Commission is guided by and gives consideration to the general policy and pattern of development set out in the Growth Policy for public infrastructure, adoption of subdivision regulations, and zoning ordinances or resolutions.

Implementation is an ongoing process and will be emphasized annually during the budget process for guidance on public infrastructure decisions and funding of public services. Revision will occur whenever the applicable policies, regulations, or other measures are adopted or revised.

7.3.2 Conditions that lead to a revision of the growth policy

Conditions that will lead to a revision of the growth policy are:

- Public initiative or referendum to change the growth policy.
- One or more neighborhood plans are adopted.
- Significant changes in community goals and objectives occur.
- Significant change to existing conditions or population that deviate more than ten percent from the projected trends in the growth policy.
- Significant change in the pattern of development within the jurisdictional area.
- Statutory changes that affect the growth policy, subdivision review criteria, public infrastructure, or other elements of the growth policy.
- Majority of Planning Board members or the Commission request revisions.

The process of revising the Growth Policy would then begin after one or more of the conditions listed above have been identified. The planning staff, Planning Board and the Commission will coordinate and cooperate in the effort to revise the Growth Policy.

7.3.3 Timetable for reviewing the growth policy

The Growth Policy will be reviewed at least once every five years by the planning staff and Planning Board as required in 76-1-601, MCA. A recommendation will be made to the BOCC whether or not revisions to the Growth Policy are necessary. The Growth Policy will be revised at least once every ten years after the Census information becomes available.

7.4 Statement of Coordination and Cooperation

Stillwater County will coordinate and cooperate with the City of Columbus in matters relating to the Stillwater County Growth Policy through participation in mutual aid and interlocal agreements. The jurisdiction of the County Planning Board includes all of Stillwater County except the incorporated limits of the City of Columbus and the unincorporated area outside the town limits as described in resolutions adopted by Stillwater County and the City of Columbus.

The Stillwater Commissioners appoint at least five members to the County Planning Board. One member has to be from the board of supervisors of the Conservation District. The County and City-County Planning Boards are designated by County resolution to review and make recommendations on subdivisions.

In relation to the Stillwater County Growth Policy and any subsequent revisions and updates, Stillwater County will cooperate and coordinate with the City of Columbus as necessary by:

- Utilizing interlocal agreements provided for by State statutes to specify roles, responsibilities, and funding of shared facilities and services.

- Coordinating and combining functions on the joint Airport Board. By communications among elected officials and appointed staff, the County shall attempt to maintain consistency and integrity of planning efforts with those of the City.

- Collaborating and sharing certain staff and staff functions, such as with the planning staff, emergency vehicle dispatch, environmental health, volunteer fire departments, the County and City shall attempt to coordinate efforts to achieve best responsiveness and effectiveness for the citizens of this area.

- Providing City officials and staff opportunities to review and comment on proposed growth policy implementation tools, including subdivision and floodplain regulations, and which may include others that have been identified as having a material affect on unincorporated areas within the planning jurisdiction. .

The County coordinates and cooperates with the City on identified public facilities and services of common interest, including airport, disaster and emergency services, fire protection, law enforcement, planning, and grants administration as allowed by State law.

This statement of coordination and cooperation is intended to identify current strategies utilized at this time. Other opportunities for future intergovernmental cooperation and coordination may be pursued as authorized by the Montana Constitution, laws, rules, regulations, or interlocal agreements.

7.5 Statement on Subdivision Review Criteria

7.5.1 Subdivision Review Criteria

Section 76-3-601 (2)(h), MCA, requires a statement explaining how governing bodies will define, evaluate, and make decisions regarding proposed subdivisions. Section 76-3-608 (3)(a), MCA, establishes six primary criteria for local government review of subdivisions. These primary criteria are: effects on agriculture; agricultural water user facilities; the natural environment; effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat; effects on local services; and effects on public health and safety. Definitions of the criteria along with explanation of evaluation and decision making regarding proposed subdivisions follows:

Effect on Agriculture

Agriculture is defined as all aspects of farming or ranching including the cultivation or tilling of soil; dairying; the production, cultivation, growing, 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.

Evaluation criteria to determine effects on agriculture include:

1. Subdivisions contiguous to unincorporated town sites or within the Columbus City-County Planning jurisdiction will likely have minimal effects on agriculture.

2. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance as defined by the Natural Resource Conservation Service will have adverse effects on agriculture.

3. The first minor subdivision from a tract of record will likely have minimal effects on agriculture.

4. The second and subsequent minor subdivisions from a tract of record are considered to have potential adverse effects on agriculture when the proposed subdivision predominately (>50%) borders land classified as agricultural or timberland by Montana Department of Revenue or state trust lands.

5. Major subdivisions are considered to have potential adverse effects on agriculture when the proposed subdivision predominately (>50%) borders land classified as agricultural or timberland.

6. Subdivisions proposed in areas adjacent to agricultural lands as classified by Montana Department of Revenue, state or federal lands in the county are considered to have potential weed problems and an adverse effect on agriculture. These adverse impacts may be mitigated with weed management plans submitted with subdivision applications and that are evaluated for compliance with the Stillwater County Weed Management Plan.

7. Compatibility with adjacent agricultural use, right to farm and herd district issues are evaluated in the subdivision review process. Adverse effects of subdivisions on agriculture may be mitigated by designs including, but not limited to cluster development, open space buffers, shelterbelts adjacent to neighboring agricultural lands or other site specific mitigation measures proposed by the subdivider or determined in the review process.

Effect on Agricultural Water User Facilities

Agricultural water user facilities are defined as 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, head gates, pipes, and other water conveying facilities.

Evaluation to determine effects on agriculture water user facilities includes:

1. Subdivisions proposed on land with agricultural water user facilities or adjoining an agricultural water user facility are considered to have potential adverse effects on the agricultural water user facilities.

2. Subdivision designs that include abandonment and removal of water rights and all agricultural water user facilities, when the facilities are no longer in use in compliance with 76-3-504, MCA, and, the Stillwater County Subdivision Regulations, will have minimal effect on agricultural water user facilities on a county wide basis.

3. Adverse effects of subdivisions on agriculture water user facilities are evaluated for compliance with 76-3-504, MCA, and the Stillwater County and Town of Columbus Subdivision Regulations which require disclosure that adequately notifies potential buyers and providing a minimum of 20 feet wide easements for maintenance of the facilities, if the facilities are still in use for agricultural purposes.

4. Adverse effects of subdivisions on agricultural water user facilities may be mitigated by site specific mitigation measures proposed by the subdivider; or determined in the review process as conditions of approval, which may include

but are not limited to piping, fencing or alternative barriers; or mitigated by agreement with persons, irrigation districts, private or public entities or other parties entitled to the water from an affected agricultural water user facility with mutually acceptable mitigation measures.

Effect on Local Services

Local Services means any and all services that local government entities, or public or private utilities are authorized to provide for the benefit of their citizens.

Evaluation to determine effects on local services include:

1. Subdivisions contiguous to unincorporated town sites or within the Columbus City-County planning jurisdiction are considered to potentially effect local services, including but not limited to water, sewer, storm drainage, street or solid waste facilities. Proposed mitigation of adverse effects through a subdivision improvements agreement and guarantees is evaluated based on state standards and cost estimates. Lack of public service and/or facility capacity to adequately serve a subdivision may be reason for denial of proposed subdivisions when adverse effects are not mitigated.

2. Major subdivisions located outside the Columbus City-County planning jurisdiction or a Census Designated Place of Absarokee, Park City or Reed Point are generally considered to have adverse effects on local services.

3. The first minor subdivision from a tract of record will likely have a negligible effect on local services.

4. A second or subsequent minor subdivision from a tract of record is generally considered to have adverse effects on local services that require additional evaluation for cumulative effects.

5. Major subdivisions are likely to have effects on traffic and require a transportation accessibility study to determine any adverse effects and mitigating measures.

6. A second or subsequent minor subdivision is likely to have effects on traffic and require a transportation accessibility study to determine any adverse cumulative effects and mitigating measures.

7. Subdivisions with access across a bridge require an evaluation, report and certification from a structural engineer on the capacity of the bridge, any adverse effects of subdivision traffic (including construction traffic), and proposed mitigating measures.

8. Subdivisions proposed in locations contiguous to existing utilities are likely to have minimal effect on utility services.

9. Subdivisions proposed in locations that are not contiguous to existing utilities are considered to have an effect on utility services and must be evaluated for availability of the service or practical alternatives.

10. Effects of subdivisions on local services may be mitigated through a subdivision improvements agreement with financial guarantees. The improvements agreement must address and guarantee construction of all on site improvements. It must also provide for payment or other means of assistance to all effected units of local government, on a proportionate share basis, for all required off site improvements. The proportionate share will be determined on a per capita basis for minor subdivisions or by a case study method for major subdivisions using the most current information available.

11. Adverse effects of subdivisions on public facilities and services provided by fire districts, water and sewer districts, other affected units of local government or utilities may be mitigated site specific mitigation measures proposed by the subdivider; mitigation may be determined in the review process as conditions of approval, including but not limited to any mutual agreements between the subdivider and affected units of local government or utilities.

Effect on Natural Environment:

The natural environment is defined as: The physical conditions which exist within a given area, including land, water, mineral, flora, fauna, noise, light and objects of historic and aesthetic significance.

Evaluation to determine effects on natural environment includes:

1. Subdivisions that are contiguous to unincorporated town sites or within the Columbus City-County planning jurisdiction and utilize available public water, sewer, streets, storm drainage, and solid waste facilities, and other public services or extension of existing facilities and services are likely to have a negligible effect on the natural environment.

2. Any portion of subdivisions or associated improvements proposed within a 100-year floodplain, as defined in the Stillwater County Floodplain Regulations and by Flood Insurance Rate Maps. Also subdivisions containing riparian areas, or adjacent rivers, streams, lakes or other natural surface water are considered to have potential adverse effects on the natural environment.

3. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with a high water table (less than 4 feet from the surface), and on wetlands or groundwater recharge areas are considered to have an adverse effect on the natural environment.

4. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with evidence of soils with building or site development limitations as defined by the Soil Survey of

Stillwater County, or on landslides or slopes greater than 25 percent are considered to have potential adverse effects on the natural environment.

5. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with historic, cultural, archaeological or paleontological features are considered to have potential adverse effects on the natural environment.

6. Adverse effects of subdivisions on the natural environment may be mitigated by designs that incorporate natural features into open space areas, site specific mitigation measures proposed by state or federal agencies or site specific mitigation measures based on detailed scientific studies.

   These important natural environment features include rivers, streams, lakes, or other natural surface water; riparian areas, 25 percent slopes, areas with soils limitations, landslide areas; or include100 year floodplain areas, wetlands, high groundwater areas, groundwater recharge areas, historic, cultural, archaeological or paleontological features; designs.

Effect on Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat:

Wildlife means animals that are not domesticated or tamed, and wildlife habitat means the place or area where wildlife naturally lives.

Evaluation to determine effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat includes:

1. Subdivisions that are contiguous to unincorporated town sites or within the Columbus City-County planning jurisdiction are generally considered to have a minimal effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

2. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed in riparian areas or on land with wetlands are generally considered to have an adverse effect on wildlife and wildlife habitat.

3. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed in areas with rare or endangered wildlife species, migration routes, or critical wildlife habitat identified by state or federal agencies, either on the land to be subdivided or adjoining lands, are considered to have adverse effects on wildlife or wildlife habitat.

4. Adverse effects of subdivisions on wildlife and wildlife habitat may be mitigated by designs, including but not limited to cluster development with open space buffers that protect the wildlife and wildlife habitat or by agreement with state and/or federal wildlife management agencies on mutually acceptable mitigation measures for rare or endangered wildlife species or critical wildlife habitat.

Effect on Public Health and Safety:

Public health and safety is defined as 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.

Evaluation to determine effects on public health and safety includes:

1. Subdivisions that are contiguous to unincorporated town sites or within the Columbus City-County planning jurisdiction and utilize available public water, sewer, streets, storm drainage, solid waste facilities, other public services and utilities are considered to have a negligible effect on public health and safety.

2. Subdivisions proposed in areas identified as a high fire hazard area by a fire district, department, company, or state or federal agency are considered to have adverse effects on public health and safety.

3. Portions of subdivisions or associated improvements proposed within a 100-year floodplain as defined in the Stillwater County Floodplain Regulations and by Flood Insurance Rate Maps are considered to have potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

4. Subdivisions proposed for mobile home parks or recreational vehicle parks in areas subject to high winds greater than 60 miles per hour are considered to have potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

5. Subdivisions proposed in areas identified as an airport influence area or that could result in an obstruction in the areas identified on an airspace plan approved by the Federal Aviation Administration are considered to have potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

6. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with high pressure gas lines or high voltage lines present are considered to have potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

7. Proposed subdivision plans for water supply systems, sewage treatment systems, storm drainage and solid waste collection and disposal submitted with the subdivision application will be evaluated during preliminary plat or summary review for adverse effects on public health and safety. Evaluation criteria used are the rules, regulations, standards and guidelines of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality and Stillwater County Board of Health.

8. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with or adjacent to Superfund or hazardous waste sites are considered to result in an adverse effect on public health and safety.

9. Subdivisions or associated improvements proposed on land with abandoned landfills, mines, wells, or waste sites are considered to result in an adverse effect on public health and safety.

10. Subdivisions proposed on land adjacent to solid waste sites, sewage treatment plants, feed lots or other facilities with offensive odors, or uses with high noise levels are considered to result in potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

11. Subdivisions proposed on land containing soils with the potential for high levels of radon, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides; buried tanks; or other pollutants are considered to result in potential adverse effects on public health and safety.

12. Adverse effects of subdivisions on public health and safety may be mitigated by designs that mitigate potential public health and safety issues in compliance with local, state and federal requirements. Proposed mitigation measures based on detailed studies by qualified professionals are used to evaluate proposed subdivisions.

7.5.2 Subdivision Evaluation and Decision Making:

The governing bodies evaluate and make decisions on proposed subdivisions utilizing primary review criteria defined above and the following statutory requirements.

- Compliance with the survey requirements required by state law;

- Compliance with local subdivision regulations, and the review procedures of the subdivision regulations;

- Provision of easements for the location and installation of any planned utilities;

- Legal and physical access to each parcel within the subdivision and the notation of that access on the applicable plat and any instrument transferring the parcel;

- Assurance that all required public improvements will be installed before final plat approval, or that their installation after final plat approval will be guaranteed as provided by the Stillwater County Subdivision Regulations. A local government may require a subdivider to pay or guarantee payment for part or all of the costs of extending capital facilities related to public health and safety, including but not limited to public roads, sewer lines, water supply lines, and storm drains to a subdivision. The costs must reasonably reflect the expected impacts directly attributable to the subdivision;

- Compliance with the requirements of section 76-3-504 and the Stillwater County Subdivision Regulations, MCA, regarding the disclosure and disposition of water rights; as provided in section 76-3-510, MCA.

- Any annexation and zoning issues are considered concurrently with subdivision review.

The basis for the governing body's decision to approve, conditionally approve, or disapprove a subdivision is whether the preliminary plat application, applicable environmental assessment, public hearing, planning board recommendations, or additional information demonstrates the development of the subdivision will meet regulatory requirements and reasonably minimize potentially significant adverse impacts. When requiring mitigation the governing body consults with the subdivider and gives due weight and consideration to the expressed preference of the subdivider.

Unmitigated impacts of a proposed development may be unacceptable and may preclude approval of the subdivision plat. In reaching a decision, the governing body issues written findings of fact that weigh the criteria in Section 76-3-608 (3)(a), MCA; which includes the effects of a proposed subdivision on agriculture, agricultural water user facilities, the natural environment, wildlife and wildlife habitat, local services, and effects on pubic health and safety.

7.6 Statement on Public Hearings Regarding Proposed Subdivisions:

This section 76-3-605 MCA requires the governing body or its designated agency to hold a public hearing on the preliminary plat when required. The governing bodies have authorized the planning boards to hold public hearings to consider all relevant evidence relating to public health, safety, and welfare, including the environmental assessment to determine whether the preliminary plat should be approved, conditionally approved, or disapproved by the governing body. The planning boards act in an advisory capacity and submit written recommendations to the governing body.

The required public hearing for a subdivision proposal will be held before the Planning Board as stated in the subdivision regulations. The format for a subdivision public hearing is as follows:

- The public hearing notice will be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the county as required by state law and the Stillwater County Subdivision Regulations.

- The subdivider and property owners immediately adjoining the exterior boundaries of the proposed subdivision are notified of the public hearing by certified mail.

- People attending the public hearing are requested to sign an attendance sheet. Public hearings may be recorded or documented with minutes for the hearing.

- The planning board chair usually conducts public hearings and gives an introduction on the purpose of the public hearing.

- A staff report and findings on the primary review criteria are presented by planning staff on the preliminary plat and environmental assessment if required by the Stillwater County and Town of Columbus Subdivision Regulations.

- A presentation of the proposed subdivision is made at the public hearing by the subdivider or an authorized representative(s).

- Questions and comments on the proposed subdivision are received after the presentations. Participants are encouraged to state their name, place of residence and whether they are in favor or opposed to the proposed subdivision and give the reasons for their position. Those who are neither in favor of nor opposed to the proposed subdivision, but have comments, may state that position and provide comments as well. Both verbal and written comments are accepted.

- The public hearing is adjourned when there is no further public comment.

Public hearings and associated notice requirements are included in the Montana Code Annotated. The Subdivision Regulations are revised periodically to remain current with statutory changes or other legal requirements.