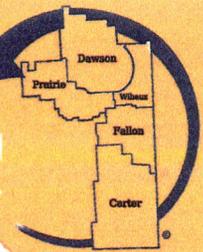


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EXHIBIT 23
DATE 1/23/13
HB _____

Eastern Plains Economic Development Corporation
EPEDC
... providing support for a better economy.



January 22, 2013

RE: Montana Department of Commerce Programs

Members of the Joint Appropriations Sub-Committee on General Government:

As a regional development corporation in eastern Montana, serving Carter, Dawson, Fallon, Prairie, Wibaux Counties, we rely on Department of Commerce funding to complete projects vital to our local economies. Department of Commerce funding allows us to successfully leverage scarce resources in our small communities.

Funding for infrastructure projects has had a significant impact on our region. Funds provided through the Tourism Infrastructure Investment Program allowed the Prairie County Museum to repair its gallery facility and upgrade its lighting system. In addition, TIIP grant dollars are being utilized to renovate the *Evelyn Cameron Heritage Center* in Terry, which will be used to house over 900 original Evelyn Cameron photographs and serve as a new venue for regional and cultural events. On a separate front, funds made available through the DOC's TSEP program helped the North Baker Water and Sewer District complete a \$3.3M infrastructure expansion project.

As an affiliate member of the Main Street program, the Town of Terry and the Prairie Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with Prairie County, were able to complete a "Terry Heritage Tourism Action Plan" with funding made available through the Department of Commerce. The comprehensive action plan allowed the community to move forward with marketing and branding efforts key to attracting visitors and bolstering business revenue. Historic preservation elements from the plan were also used in the Main Street funded Town of Terry Growth Policy, which is slated for adoption as Terry prepares for its future.

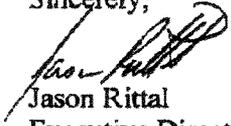
The importance of Department of Commerce planning funds cannot be stressed enough. Money utilized to provide regional land use planning documents and training sessions afforded our communities the opportunity to communicate with experienced consultants about strategies for development and local issues that may otherwise have gone unaddressed.

Moreover, without DOC planning funds, our economic development organization may cease to exist. CRDC funds provide the match for federal EDA dollars that keep us operating in service to our counties and municipalities. Within the last fiscal year, the DOC's \$36,000 CRDC investment in our organization permitted the EPEDC to raise well over \$3.5M dollars for projects in the region. \$132,000 in additional funds were utilized as match to establish the Eastern Montana Impact Coalition, an organization made up of two other CRDC regions and one local development organization, working together to tackle regional needs on an ever-evolving economic frontier.

As we look to the future, the EPEDC hopes to continue utilizing other essential Department of Commerce resources, like the Big Sky Development Trust fund, for job creation and infrastructure planning to help our communities deal with the impacts of increased natural resource development and the need for new and improved services. We also hope that the Department of Commerce recognizes the immense benefits of not only its high profile programs, but also its smaller programs like Main Street. They all play a vital role in what we do.

We thank you for your time and service to the State of Montana.

Sincerely,



Jason Rittal
Executive Director