

# Red Lodge Parks, Trees and Recreation Board

## ANNUAL REPORT

*FY 2019 (July 1, 2018 – June 30, 2019)*

Title 8, Chapter 7 of the Red Lodge City Code defines composition, duties and responsibilities of the Red Lodge Parks, Trees and Recreation Board. The purpose of this code is to establish, improve, care for, regulate and manage a system of public recreation and public trees. The Board Mission is to protect, enhance, and maintain parks, facilities, natural resources, open space, trails, trees and plants by developing and executing the Comprehensive Parks Plan, Trails Plan, Active Transportation Plan and Urban Forestry Management Plan. The Board is advisory to the City Council and the Mayor and consists of seven members, six area residents of which up to two may reside outside of the City limits but within five miles of the City limits, and a member of the City Council. Current Board members include:

**Anna Drew**, Chair, term expires December 2020

**Rue Freeman**, Vice-Chair, term expires December 2020

**Theresa Whistler**, Secretary, term expires December 2019

**Kevin Bonk**, term expires December 2020

**Bryan Romeijn**, term expires December 2019

**Carol Bloomer**, term expires December 2020

**Rob Weamer**, City Council Representative, term expires December 2019

The Board receives support from members of the City staff designated by the Mayor: James Caniglia, Community Development Director, Neil Matthews-Pennanen, Assistant Planner and Jim Bushnell, Public Works Director.

Board functions are outlined in:

- Ordinance 918,  
Composition and  
Responsibilities of the Red  
Lodge, Parks, Trees and  
Recreation Board
- Ordinance 919,  
Regulations of Trees on  
City Owned Land and  
Public Rights-of-Way



## Urban Forestry Tree Programs

Decisions concerning City trees continue to be guided by the **Urban Forestry Management Plan** (UFMP), which was approved in March 2018. Although there was a very little 2018/2019 budget available for Parks, Trails, Recreation (and Urban Forestry), there were several efforts to support public trees and forestry in Red Lodge.

**Applications for Grants:** As is normally done, the Assistant City Planner and Parks Board Tree Committee worked together on Grant applications to DNRC for both Arbor Day and Forestry Development. A grant of \$750 for Arbor day was awarded to the City, but the Development Grant was denied. The City of Red Lodge has become financially dependent on the DNRC development grant to fund its Cost-share Trees Program and to manage City Forestry.

The Application to **DNRC's Development Grant** was proposed to support continued Cost-share Trees (110 cost share trees have been planted to date) and to address City trees in Finn Park specifically.

Some of the larger and aging poplar (cottonwood) trees in Finn Park have been identified as a public safety hazard. The Parks Board sought funds from DNRC to remove the most critical trees and plant younger replacements in the Park. The City was not awarded the DNRC Development Grant nor did it have matching funds this past year. The project would have entailed in-kind volunteer hours to match DNRC dollars.



Because volunteers lack the equipment or skills necessary to prune high, large limbs or remove large trees safely contracted professionals are necessary. Without funding, nothing was done to prune or remove the most critical trees in Finn or Rotary Park in 2018/2019. The Board is again seeking DNRC funds to address large trees in our Parks and mitigate any potential public safety hazards for the 2019/2020 year.



**Cost-share Tree Program:** The cost-share tree program was suspended in Spring 2019 after being a part of the Urban Forestry program for 6 years, since 2013. The program is still popular and expected by the public year-over-year. Many residents were disappointed this year to find trees were not available for the program. It is hoped that funding for 2019/2020 is restored from both the City and DNRC Grants to support the Cost-share tree program so residents may carry on the trend of planting 10-15 more public trees per year and adding trees to Red Lodge boulevards.

While there was no funding to plant new cost-share trees in the 2018/2019 budget, the Parks Board took steps to improve care of the trees already planted.

**Tree Care and Outreach:** The Parks Board sponsored a free public Pruning Workshop on May 4<sup>th</sup>. This year's event was held at the Visitor's Center grounds. Although it was poorly attended, people that did attend participated in pruning shrubs and trees at the Center and continued pruning trees North of the round-about on Hwy 212.



The Horticultural expert, Leslie Marty, who had volunteered to lead the pruning workshop, gave Chamber of Commerce representatives landscaping advice while on site.

In June, the Parks Board organized volunteers from the high school to assess trees in the public rights-of-way in two different areas of the City where residents have planted cost-share trees. These volunteers inspected and then placed door hangers with diagnostic notes to educate homeowners and encourage optimal tree care.



To celebrate **Arbor Day** in 2018, the Parks Board conducted two related events. First, Parks Board members conducted tree education activities with elementary school classes in early September. These included guided and self-guided scavenger hunts culminating

with submission of pictures and poems about trees by the students. Some of these were published in the Carbon County News.





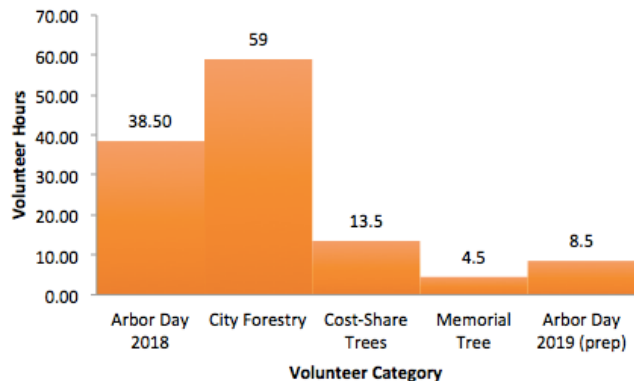
Next, several members of the Parks Board invited the public to plant 5 new trees in Finn Park. Despite the early snow, all 5 trees were successfully planted!

The City was again certified as a **Tree City USA** for achieving the standards set forth by the National Arbor Day Foundation for activities conducted by the Parks Board and community. Maintaining a Tree City USA status requires the City to spend a

minimum of \$2 per resident towards tree related projects every year. Red Lodge has been a Tree City USA for 20 years!

A supplemental **Tree City USA Growth Award** was awarded to the city for the fifth year in a row. This award recognized the Parks, Trees, and Recreation Board going above and beyond, carrying out events such as maintaining a cost-share tree program, celebrating Arbor Day, offering a free tree pruning workshop, conducting tree care assessments and continued dedication to caring for the urban forest.

**Volunteer Hours for City Trees**



**Public Trees Watering** in the Parks and downtown business area was not done this

past growing season due to the very rainy month of June though some of the young Arbor Day trees planted last year in Finn Park could have used regular watering. Funds available through a RLACF grant to the City for watering City trees was not used and may be carried over to next year’s watering period.

## Recreational Facilities, Ongoing Projects & Accomplishments

**Moose Trails Playground:** @ Lion’s Park: Several of the broken and sharp-edged pole caps were replaced in September 2018 leading an effort to address maintenance at Moose Trails Park. Staining was planned to begin September 2018 utilizing volunteer labor thanks to the Rotary Club, but was delayed to a July 2019 start due to extended months of prohibitive weather conditions. This is a large project that will involve many more volunteer hours and a good amount of contract work.



**Skate Park:** A new guardrail was installed on the Northeast ramps in the **skate park** because the old one had fallen into disrepair. The decking was also replaced. This work was done late June 2019 with a generous donation (\$500) from community members concerned about the skate park, its need for maintenance, and its heavy use.



The installation was possible because of skilled, volunteer labor spearheaded by Bryan Romeijn of the Parks Board. This group of volunteers also installed slats along a small portion of the skate park fence to help create some shade for skate park users.

The Parks Board gave approval for a project to beautify the skate park. Janice Polzin, through the Carbon County Arts Guild, organized the Skate Park Collaboration Kids Camp to paint the sides of skate park ramps so the area would be more visually appealing. The camp was scheduled to paint during the week of July 22 2019.

Additional park renovations are being explored and will be a focus over the 2019/2020 year.

**Pickle Ball Courts:** @ Field School Park: The Red Lodge Pickle Ball Group proposed painting 2 pickle ball courts on the center Tennis Court at Field School Park and asked permission to leave a storage bench for netting on the north side of the courts near the fencing. 1 of 3 Tennis Courts was left untouched by this proposal and the Parks Board granted permission after checking with tennis players (there is no tennis user group). Pickleball has become very popular with a large following in Red Lodge.



**Red Lodge Ice LED Lighting:** @ Lions Park: Red Lodge Ice, Sustainability Coordinator, Kathryn Eklund and Beartooth Electric each contributed time and resources to making LED upgrades and pole additions to City lighting within Lions Park adjacent to the Ice Skate rink/center field. The 6 lights eliminate light pollution while improving lighting

over the rink and may be turned off and on as needed rather than on a fixed schedule.

**Parks Clean-up:** There were numerous volunteers that helped with cleanup at several parks throughout the city on Earth Day. Volunteers dedicated three hours to cleaning up parks and other public areas. During this time, seven parks, two multi-use trails, and several walking and biking trails were cleaned by volunteers.



More than 30 volunteers came out to help take care of their favorite parks. Some of the projects completed during parks clean-up included removal of old tires from Coal Miners Park, cleaning out of horse-shoe pits in Lions Park, and sweeping gravel off mixed-use trails along highways 78 and 212, raking and replacing mulch at playgrounds and lots of winter trash pickup.

Girl Scout Troop 2230 adopted Finn Park starting with Parks Clean-up on Earth Day. Their efforts and attention to this park will enable this neighborhood park to really shine in the future. They started off well, cleaning up Finn Park as part of the Earth Day celebration.

In addition to cleaning up the City’s parks, Earth Day also provided an opportunity for community members to add to the City’s urban forest. Several volunteers contributed their time by planting a memorial tree at the Chamber of Commerce.

**The Earth Day block party:** organized by Energy Corps member Kathryn Eklund was once again a huge success. There were more than a dozen booths spanning a wide range of issues and attracting numerous visitors.



**Parks Board Tables:** Two of the tables were organized and operated by Parks Board members. One of these focused on protecting and expanding the City’s urban forest while the other enabled members of the community to learn more about the idea of a potential Parks and Recreation District in the Red Lodge area.



**Bee City USA Grant Application:** Courtney Long presented the option for Red Lodge to become the first Bee City USA in the State of Montana to Parks Board. The application and requirements to be considered a “Bee City” require very little funding (\$100/year for the application) and a number of educational and bee-scaping activities that may be met by volunteers (similar to what’s done for the City’s Tree City USA standing). The Board considers this a good fit for its Tree Committee, which could become “Bee and Tree Committee”.

## Challenges & Future Goals

The Red Lodge park infrastructure relies heavily on volunteers not only to keep the parks beautiful but to carry out routine maintenance. Many of the Parks, Trails and Facilities have user groups that maintain a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City. The MOU with each user group outlines shared responsibilities for maintenance between the City and the User Group.

Because the Parks budget was reduced further this fiscal year (2018/19) Parks Board determined it would be useful to understand how these MOUs are holding up and what impacts the City may face in maintaining Parks without a budget to do so. **Not all user groups remain active and inactive user groups MOUs should be dissolved. The City should not count on active participation maintaining parks or facilities under outdated MOUs.** Public works is ultimately responsible for all Parks and Forestry in the City although they do not have the budget, time or staff to manage alone – especially in light of their on-going efforts to address water, storm-water and street CIPs.

Park/Facility	User Group MOU	Active Date	Term	Notes
City Pool	None		None	
Coal Miners Park	Adult Co-Ed Softball	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Baseball/little League	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Youth Soccer	7/12/16	5 years	
	Disc Golf	7/12/16	5 years	
	RL Mountain Biking	7/12/16	5 years	
Upper Coal Miners Park	RL Youth Soccer	1/25/18	Development	
Skate Park	Skate Park Users	7/12/16	5 years	Dissolution Recommended
Lions Park	Lions Club	4/26/16	4 years	
	Red Lodge Ice	4/26/16	5 years	
Field School Park	None			
Pride Park	None			
Rotary Park	RL Rotary Club	4/26/16	5 years	
Finn Park	None			
Creekside Park	None			
Van Dyke Park	None			
Double Ditch Dog Park	Dog Owners	7/12/16	5 years	Dissolution Recommended
Phillips Park (Mtn Springs Villa)	None			
Trails	BRTA	4/26/16	5 years	



**Lions:** The City has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Lions organization representing the share of work and costs for maintenance between the City and Red Lodge Lions. Costs above and beyond \$500/year are responsibility of the City.

Work on the Lions Park gazebo was contracted and carried out during the summer of 2018 with the help of a matching grant from the Lions Club. The hardier materials used should allow the gazebo to withstand the elements in Red Lodge for years to come, but the complexities of electronics within the structure added to cost and time of the project. The gazebo is not finished and the Parks Board is seeking a way to fund the completion of this project.



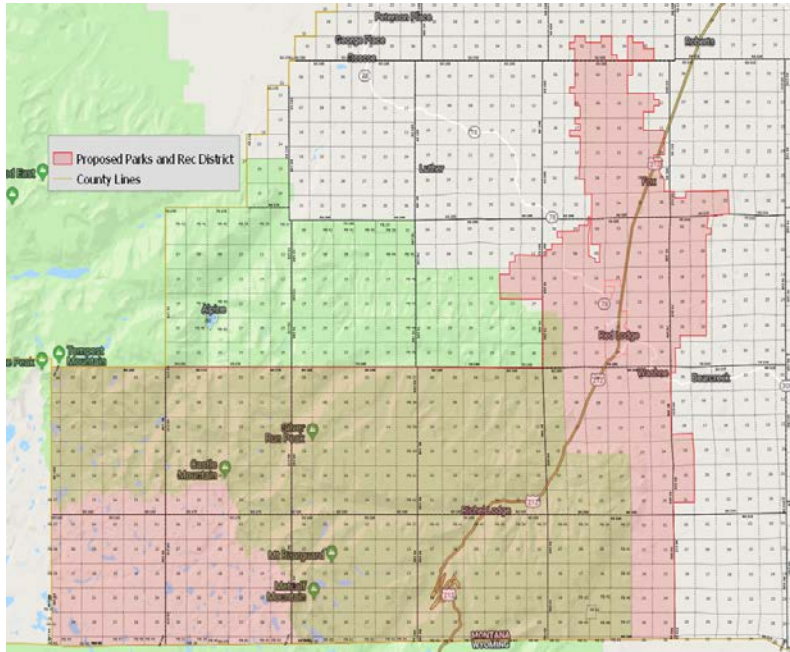
Lions Club alerted City staff in August of 2018 that the pump for the sprinkler system in the park had broken. The replacement of this pump required a significant portion of the limited funds available for parks this fiscal year.



**City Pool:** After utilizing the City Pool long past its expected lifespan of 30 years, the City Pool did not reopen for the summer of 2019. The perennial cost of repairing the aging pool, public works man-hours and continuous water leakage was finally too high to overcome. The Parks Board has been looking into various options to fund the construction of a new pool at the site of the existing pool. This was the most supported option by Public Works and the Community among all options presented in the pool study.

**Proposal for a Parks and Recreation District:** Knowing the Pool was at risk and in relation to a shrinking Parks Budget year-over-year, the Parks Board took action to propose a District to the City and County (in-line with its mention within the City’s 2015 Comprehensive Parks Plan). The proposed district would have cost tax payers within the elementary school district 18 mils (\$48.60) per each \$200k value of property. It was meant to include most residents that do use City Parks and Facilities because of their adjacency and dependency on the City for such facilities. Neither the City nor County showed favor in taking the proposal (as a resolution) to voters within the elementary district due in part to concerns about renewing the City resort tax first.

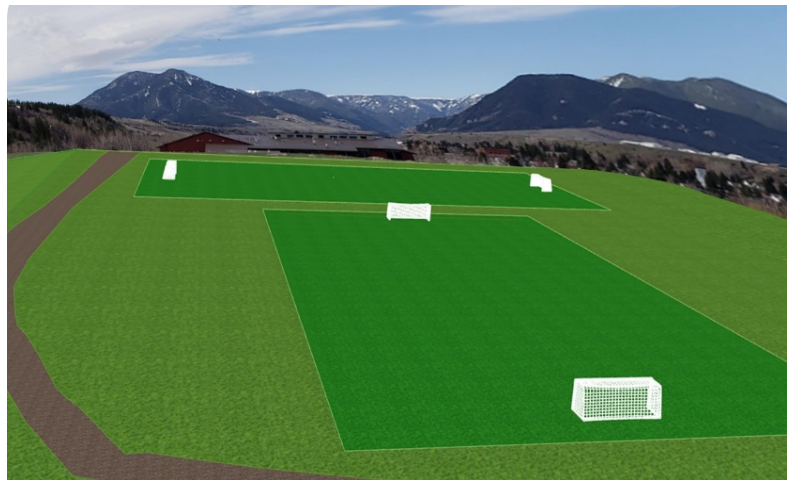




Board members worked with City Planning, department of Revenue, and consulted many community members to sound out a district that could raise a budget to improve and sustain the Parks infrastructure. Outreach through the Beartooth Front Community Forum was planned for April 2019 and several presentations to local organizations were made for the purpose of collecting feedback: Chamber of Commerce, Business Alliance, Lions Club, Rotary Club, BRTA, RLACF and the RL School Board received presentations. The proposal has been couched until City Council decides how they

want to fund parks.

**Upper Coal Miners Park (Development):** A grant was received from Montana DNRC to fund planning and engineering for new soccer fields in Coal Miners Park. Montana DEQ pursued mine reclamation funds to fund a repository cap which would provide enough topsoil for a field. Red Lodge Youth Soccer (RLYS) had a well drilled to provide irrigation for the new field. Unfortunately, soil installation was deemed to be too expensive given the mine reclamation funds available for this project. The City of Red Lodge and RLYS are looking into other ways to fund the installation of soil.



**Rotary Youth Leadership Awardees (RYLA) Proposal to Parks Board:** Sophomore students awarded \$50 each through the Rotary Leadership program merged their awards for a project to install a single water bottle filling station in Pride Park. After working with Public Works to ensure all design specs and requirements for the design were met, estimates for excavation and splitting water metering came back too high to move ahead (in excess of \$20,000). Parks Board approved their project because they met Public Works approval, but had no money to contribute to the project. The RYLA project team continued fundraising efforts and has since found an affordable location next to the ATM in front of Pollard parking (~\$6,000) to install the filling station.

## Trails

Removal of old tires from Beartooth Lane was carried out in conjunction with **Earth Day**. This will contribute to the eventual development of a trail as a secondary entrance on the north side of Coal Miners Park.

A plan for BRTA to extend the Wellness Trail south along the west bench was presented to the Parks Board in the spring of 2019. It was later proposed they move ahead with the Diamond-C trail due to details prohibiting action on the Wellness trail.

Although the Parks Board does not have funds to contribute to this effort, The Board approved the plan and will continue coordinating with BRTA to make this happen. This is an example of volunteers and non-profits continuing to promote development of parks and recreation amenities despite the lack of funding from the City government.



## Weed Control



Each year spraying of noxious weeds in Coal Miners Park, Double Ditch Dog Park, Skate Park, Rotary Park and Lions Park is included in the Parks budget.

Noxious weed control efforts have been stepped up over the past few years in Coal Miners Park. The noxious weed control efforts here have greatly reduced the amount of noxious plants in this park.

The City has benefitted from the efforts of Red Lodge High School students mapping and assessing weed infestations in Coal Miners Park and the areas surrounding the High School. Each year more weeds are surveyed and identified on this land. The continued efforts to map the problem weeds in this area will help the City to determine the level of spraying needed to control weeds going into the future.