

Red Lodge Resilience Questions: Complete Responses

The COVID-19 crisis is currently disrupting our community's economic and physical health. In addition to this immediate concern, the 2017 Montana Climate Assessment projects that with continued temperature increases, the South Central Climate Zone (which includes Carbon County) is likely to face climate disruptions such as more frequent and intensified droughts and wildfires.

What are the biggest assets and challenges you see to our community's ability to respond to, withstand, and recover from incidents like these?

Corey Thompson

City of Red Lodge Sustainability Board Chair



Assets in Red Lodge: the 55 plus non profits in a town of 2300, Red Lodge Area Community Foundation, Red Lodge Fire Department, a local hospital (Beartooth Clinic), a supportive local government.

Challenges: about 1/3 of homes in Red Lodge are second homes and vacant for part of the year, a challenging physical environment (mountainous, 8 months of winter, extreme weather conditions which includes fire danger in the summer and large amounts of snowfall in the winter), the economics of the town relies heavily on tourism during the summer and winter months.

Tom Kohley

County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator



In terms of assets, the communities in Carbon County are close and well connected. Small, tight communities tend to have more compassion for their neighbors and help care for community members in need. This adds to the resiliency of the community and helps us withstand any emergency or disaster. These same characteristics also help with community recovery.

We are also very fortunate to have a large number of experienced emergency personnel in our community per capita. There are many skilled individuals in our community who we can rely on to assist with planning, operations, logistics and finance of large incidents.

Related to small communities, some of the challenges include limited local resources and limited preparedness for large scale incidents. By this I mean limited clinic and hospitalization capacity, lack of suitable PPE, lack of public health capacity, etc. Our local preparedness level and detail in our local emergency and operations plans (both public and private) were lacking for such a pandemic. The same is true for long-term impacts related to climate change.

Jeff DiBenedetto

Beartooth Front Community Forum Chair & Planning Board Member



Another definition of community resilience is the capacity of a community to bounce back from adversity. Julia Haggerty, assistant professor of geography in the Department of Earth Sciences at Montana State University, described community resilience as a function of four important community assets. These assets include people's willingness to provide leadership and become involved; having processes for public involvement and participation (e.g. public meetings, planning and decision making); having networks both within community and reaching outside the community; and a community with a vision for the future. Many of these assets are present in the community. Community challenges, in addition to health, social and economic effects associated with COVID-19, include future challenges associated with a changing climate (see 2017 Montana Climate Assessment) and a growing population and the potential effects on water availability (i.e. for irrigation, municipal, aquatic ecosystems), social services and infrastructure, affordable housing, local agriculture, changes to land use patterns and wildlife habitat.

Therese Picasso-Edwards

Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Resilient Community and Youth Programs Director



I have been impressed with the continued planning and preparation of our county's disaster preparedness team. They include community-wide stakeholders, like the Foundation, in their planning, partnering and decision-making. An example of this partnership in action is the creation, this spring, of the Carbon County COVID19 Relief Fund. Disaster preparedness continues to share what they learn about approaching threats, prepare what could come and widely disseminate information in a consistent fashion.

Common challenges in a rural area (parts of our county are considered frontier) is effective communication to all citizens, regardless of their physical isolation and connection to cell phones or computers. That's where communication strategies and neighbors helping neighbors come in.

Susann Beug:

Carbon County Resource Council Chair



ASSETS: Red Lodge has a strong sense of community. We help each other and look out for each other. We also have a large number of highly educated people in our community, many retired, who through their experiences outside of a rural community bring in a more worldly view to our community. Most enjoy sharing their knowledge and experience with others including our youth. We have a large, active nonprofit community who fill many voids the city and county aren't able to. We have a good school system that is supported by the community.

CHALLENGES: Our economy is largely based on tourism and the ski industry, both of which are seasonal, that means our economy depends on many low paying service industry jobs. Many in our community are living below the poverty level and in the off season they have an even harder time making ends meet. We also have many small businesses who are seasonally dependent on income. Being close to Billings many residents choose to shop there rather than supporting local businesses, not taking into account travel expenses and lost time, for lower prices. This takes money out of our community

Do you consider the Red Lodge area to be a resilient community? Why or why not?

Corey Thompson

City of Red Lodge Sustainability Board Chair



Red Lodge is absolutely resilient! Two incidents within the last ten years, the Cascade Fire and the Covid-19 pandemic, have proven that local folks can and will gather together, and will also willingly work with county and state forces, to face challenges.

Tom Kohley

County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator



I would say that Red Lodge is resilient to most of its "common" emergencies and disasters. We frequently train and prepare for high-frequency, low impact events (e.g., fire) but lack the training and preparedness for low-frequency, high impact events such as pandemics. With limited resources and time, we must often prioritize which of

these types of scenarios we will focus on for training. Unfortunately, we often choose to prepare for the common incidents and sometimes neglect our preparedness for less common yet more impactful events.

Jeff DiBenedetto

Beartooth Front Community Forum Chair & Planning Board Member



The community has the capacity to function as a resilient community. The community exhibits a number of assets mentioned above, particularly people and community networks as evidenced by the number of volunteer organizations and the associated inter-community networks. They demonstrate the willingness of community members to volunteer time, energy, and money to address various community issues. Historically, Red Lodge has demonstrated an ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity. In response to the decline of coal mining, the community adapted and portrayed itself as a gateway to Yellowstone National Park and the Beartooth Mountains through the promotion and construction of the Beartooth Highway. In the early 1950s Red Lodge celebrated its diversity and ethnic roots through sponsoring and promoting the Festival of Nations.

Therese Picasso-Edwards

Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Resilient Community and Youth Programs Director



Yes, the Red Lodge area citizens are generous and deeply committed to supporting their community through donation of their time, talents and resources. The Red Lodge Area Community Foundation strives to connect people and build community. The mission of the Foundation's Resilient Community program area is to work together to strengthen the health of the community by listening and responding to expressed concerns and ideas. This has revealed to be in the areas of community mental health, age friendly initiatives, connection to resources, housing and transportation. By partnering with local government, businesses, nonprofits and committed citizens, we are seeing continued strength and resilience of our community.

Susann Beug

Carbon County Resource Council Chair



YES, we are resilient! Our sense of community helps us get through the tough times. We support each other. We have a huge volunteer force that wears many hats and fills many needs. We live in a beautiful place with a clean environment. In general our local businesses are supported by the community and in turn they support the community

What do you think are the most effective ways for Red Lodge and other rural communities to become more resilient?

Corey Thompson

City of Red Lodge Sustainability Board Chair



If possible, anticipate potential events and plan ahead. For example, wildfires are a fact of life in the west and careful planning and quick action diverted a potentially disastrous situation. The pandemic, however, caught everyone off guard but our local signs “Together We Can Do This) in every business in town shows our solidarity in combating this disease.

Tom Kohley

County Disaster and Emergency Services Coordinator



- Keep the community informed and engage residents to participate in planning processes
- Encourage self-preparedness (i.e., emergency kits, home-evacuation plans, etc.)
- Train and exercise on low-frequency, high impact incidents
- Promote volunteerism especially in the emergency services/response fields and partner with VOADs (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters).
- Diversity the economic base of the community so that impacts don't obliterate the one and only business sector
- Keep emergency plans current and relevant
- Emphasize partnerships and coordinate with neighboring communities/agencies/organizations to encourage mutual aid
- Leverage State and Federal funding to mitigate for potential emergencies and disasters

Jeff DiBenedetto

Beartooth Front Community Forum Chair & Planning Board Member



Community resilience can be improved through education, transparency and open discussions about emerging issues, community challenges and solutions. This can be accomplished by building upon the community assets mentioned above. These

include expanding local networks to include improved intergovernmental (municipal, county, state) relationships and collaboration, utilizing universities as sources of relevant scientific information, utilize regional and state non-governmental organizations for information, support and funding sources, and other communities to seek information and examples addressing similar community issues and challenges.

Therese Picasso-Edwards

Red Lodge Area Community Foundation Resilient Community and Youth Programs Director



Keep listening to community expressed ideas and concerns. Have a consistent communication plan which includes community members from all reaches. Strive toward health equity. Bring all ideas to the table, no matter how varied and respect and consider these ideas. Consider all ages, incomes and abilities when planning. Continue to collaborate with community leaders and organizations.

Susann Beug:

Carbon County Resource Council Chair



Build a sense of community. It is not one faction against another but how can we all together make this a better place. Volunteerism is an important aspect of any resilient community. Teaching and modeling respect for each other and different ideas. Using retired community members as an asset rather than a liability. Respect and engage the younger generation.