



# NEWSLINE

Montana Department of Transportation  
mdt.mt.gov



June 2022

## Annual Beartooth Highway Clearing Completed for 2022

This All-American Scenic Byway closes each winter because of excessive snow and adverse winter conditions and typically opens by the Friday of Memorial Day weekend. Snow levels vary and drifts can be as high as 26 feet in the higher elevations. Each spring, MDT is responsible for the highway to the Montana/Wyoming border, where the National Park Service takes over maintenance responsibilities through Wyoming, back into Montana, and into Yellowstone Park. MDT and NPS coordinate closely to keep the road open throughout the summer.



**NOTE:** The Beartooth Highway closed temporarily due to late season storms and winter snowfall after opening on May 27, 2022. Weather-related closures or travel impacts on this seasonal route are not uncommon, so always #KnowBeforeYouGo and check MDT 511 and other travel resources before planning your trip: <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/>

### WATCH: 2022 Beartooth Clearing Playlist on YouTube

Opening the Beartooth Highway is a huge undertaking! Check out the videos from 2022 by visiting MDT's YouTube channel ([www.youtube.com/user/MontanaDOT](https://www.youtube.com/user/MontanaDOT)) or by scanning the QR code to the right with your mobile device.



*Pictured above, from top to bottom: JD, the Beartooth Highway mascot, (shown seated on gate) stands guard over the "bear"icade before opening day; Plowing along the Beartooth Highway is a workspace with a view—just ask MDT's dedicated clearing team!*

## Montana's SOAR Program Nationally Recognized

Montana's Safe On All Roads (SOAR) Program is a tribal traffic safety program MDT implemented in 2006. Through this program, each Tribal Community employs their own coordinator with funding through MDT's highway traffic safety program. During the 2022 Lifesavers Conference, Montana's SOAR Coordinators were recognized with the prestigious 2022 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Public Service Award.



Given all of the challenges the COVID pandemic has brought to these communities, they were more than worthy of receiving this award. These coordinators were integral in continuing public education and outreach through the pandemic. Tribal communities remained in quarantine and/or lockdown for many months in 2021, yet these coordinators ensured traffic safety messages continued to reach Tribal members. The passion they add to their activities and outreach efforts contribute to the overall success of the SOAR program.

Only ten of these national awards are given each year, making this a very notable and well-deserved accomplishment! Eileen Henderson (Blackfeet Nation) and Jacintha Four Souls (Rocky Boy/Chippewa Cree) were on hand to accept the award on behalf of the SOAR program (pictured above). All of the winners include:

- Eileen Henderson (Blackfeet Nation)
- Jacintha Four Souls (Rocky Boy Chippewa Cree)
- Avis Spencer (Fort Belknap Indian Community)
- Lindsey O'Neill (Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes)
- Darcee Belgarde and Shanae Burshia (Fort Peck Community College)
- Jeromena Beartusk, John Grinsell and Patricia Ramos (Northern Cheyenne)

Congratulations to all! To read the news release from NHTSA, visit <https://www.nhtsa.gov/press-releases/2022-public-service-awards-lifesavers>.

For more information on the SOAR Program, contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or [scozzie@mt.gov](mailto:scozzie@mt.gov).



## Federal Surface Transportation Program Status

One of the new programs established by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) is the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Program. This program provides funding to states to strategically deploy electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and to establish an interconnected network to facilitate collection, access, and reliability. Montana will receive approximately \$43 million over five years to support the expansion of EV. Any EV charging infrastructure projects acquired or installed with NEVI Formula funding must be located along designated Alternative Fuel Corridors which in Montana are: I-90, I-15, I-94, US-93, and US-2. Currently, MDT is collaborating with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) in developing the state EV infrastructure deployment plan for submission by August 1, 2022, for Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approval. For more information on Montana's EV plan, please visit <https://deq.mt.gov/energy/Programs/fuels>.

## NEWSLINE SUBSCRIPTION UPDATES

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- **By email:** [leichenfels@mt.gov](mailto:leichenfels@mt.gov)
- **By phone\*:** 444-7614

**\*Please leave a voicemail with your name, phone number, and best time of day to reach you to update your subscription preferences or information.**

**Moving? Change of address? Please let us know!** We are happy to update your current mailing address if you wish to continue receiving the Newsline.

**NOTE:** Due to state costs associated with printing and mailing, all returned copies of the Newsline will be removed from future mailings to that address. New subscriptions may be requested at any time through the contact information above. We thank you in advance for your help in reducing waste and your assistance in providing updates to your subscription information as they occur.



*In the vast, untouched landscapes that surround the Beartooth Highway, sometimes it's nice to see a friendly face! A resident mountain goat stops to greet MDT's crews during the annual clearing of the Beartooth Highway.*

## New Chief Engineer

**D**ustin Rouse is MDT's new Chief Engineer and Highways and Engineering Division Administrator. Dustin graduated from Montana Tech in Engineering Science and obtained his PE in Civil Engineering in 2003. Dustin worked in the oil and gas industry in Wyoming and as the Production Manager at Plastic Model Engineering in Idaho before returning home to Montana. Dustin's transportation background began over 23 years ago in Butte District Construction. From there, he moved on to become the Hydraulics Engineer for Great Falls and then into the Great Falls Area Engineer position. Dustin returned to Butte in 2011 as the Butte District Preconstruction Engineer, before returning to Helena to move into the Preconstruction Engineer position in the Highways and Engineering Division in 2016. This breadth of experience allowed him to learn from great mentors and peers in the districts and in Helena.

*Dustin Rouse, MDT Chief Engineer/ Engineering Division Administrator*

In this new role, Dustin is focused on empowering MDT's team to not only design and build a safe and resilient infrastructure, but to encourage innovation, collaboration, and to help his team set and reach their personal goals along the way.

**Fun Facts About Dustin:** Dustin grew up working on ranches in Montana's Big Hole valley. He loves camping with family and friends, and enjoys being on and around the water while rafting, fly-fishing, water skiing, or diving.

Contact Dustin at 444-6005 or [drouse@mt.gov](mailto:drouse@mt.gov).

## New Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator

**S**helby Clark is MDT's new bicycle/ pedestrian coordinator. She will serve as a contact for bicycle and pedestrian safety information, assist with design standards for bicycle/pedestrian facilities, supply signs for bicycling events, provide bicycle touring information, and coordinate training of MDT and local staff in bicycle and pedestrian facility design. Arriving from Alaska, Shelby joins the team with a background in geography and ethnobotany.

**Fun Facts About Shelby:** In her off time she enjoys yoga, gardening and snowboarding.

Contact Shelby at 444-9273 or [mdtbikeped@mt.gov](mailto:mdtbikeped@mt.gov).



*Shelby Clark, MDT Bicycle & Pedestrian Coordinator*

## MDT Announces EMS Grant Opportunity, Applications Due June 30, 2022

**M**DT has opened the State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023 application period for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Grants to enhance traffic safety in Montana. The purpose of the program is to provide grants to mostly volunteer, Medicare-level billing providers for emergency response vehicles, ambulances, equipment to provide medical care, communications equipment, and training. Approximately \$1 million is granted annually by the program, and grant recipients are required to provide a 10% match for any grant funds received.

**Online Application:** Applications will only be accepted through the Montana Grants and Loan Web grants system at <https://funding.mt.gov/index.do>. Applicants will need to register and submit application through the web-based system. For program eligibility and the application process, see MDT's website at <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/business/grants-ems.aspx>.

For more information, contact Spencer Harris at 444-0856 or [sharris@mt.gov](mailto:sharris@mt.gov).

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# Share the Goal of Vision Zero and Share the Road

Summer brings greater numbers of travelers to our state's roadways and communities, and active travel modes like walking or bicycling become a popular way to enjoy this beautiful, but short season. When we share the road, we share the goal of Vision Zero, making travel safe and enjoyable for all. As you venture out, remember to share the road with others by practicing these safety tips:

## Pedestrians

- Be visible. Wear brightly colored and reflective clothing.
- Avoid distractions when walking, your eyes and ears are your best tools for staying safe. Put down your phone and avoid wearing headphones.
- Stay on sidewalks whenever possible. If a sidewalk is not available, be sure to walk on the side of the road facing traffic.
- Be predictable. Use crosswalks and follow pedestrian crossing signals.
- Look left, right, then left again before entering the roadway.
- Never assume a driver will give you the right of way. Make eye contact with the driver of a stopped or approaching vehicle before entering the roadway.

## Bicyclists

- Be sure to check your equipment for proper fit, maintenance, and tire pressure.
- Plan to be seen. That means wearing bright clothing and using lights when riding at night.
- Always wear a helmet.
- Bicyclists are required to follow all traffic laws. That means riding in the same direction as traffic, using hand signals for turns and obeying traffic signs and signals.

## Signal Turns - Be Predictable



## Motorists

- Stay off your phone and be aware. Distracted driving is a leading cause of crashes, including those with bicyclists and other vulnerable road users.
- Make eye contact with bicyclists and pedestrians waiting to cross at intersections before making turns.
- Always yield to a pedestrian crossing the roadway within a marked crosswalk or within an unmarked crosswalk at an intersection. Do not pass vehicles stopped at a crosswalk. They have stopped to allow pedestrians to pass or make sure the way is clear.
- Check twice before passing a bicyclist and be sure to give a safe buffer (3-5 feet) when passing. If you do not have room to safely pass a bicyclist, slow down and wait to pass. When you are following a bicyclist, don't tailgate; allow yourself plenty of space in case you need to stop suddenly.
- Understand bicyclists are different but equal. A car weighs 2 tons or more, while the average bicycle is 20 lbs. Give bicyclists space and recognize they are more vulnerable to injury in a crash. Bicyclists are allowed on all roads in Montana unless explicitly prohibited by signage.
- Look before you leave your vehicle. Bicyclists fear getting "doored." Before you open your door look into the side-view mirror to see if a bicyclist is approaching.

# Building Connections to Bring Montana Together

There are over 73,000\* miles of roads open to public travel in our state (including nearly 12,923 miles of MDT routes) that accommodate nearly 13 billion annual vehicle miles traveled (AVMT). Simply put, roads and



Summer as seen from the Beartooth Highway (US Highway 212).

roadways (including bridges) keep our great state connected and moving forward! The third Tuesday in June marks Good Roads Day – designated by the Montana Legislature in 1947, whereby the people of the state are asked to contribute toward the improvement and safety of public highways (MCA 60-1-104). For MDT, building "good roads" takes time and means a continuous planning process that is underway long before ground is ever broken on a project. It can take eight years to complete a road project, but long-range planning starts anywhere from 1-20 years prior to the project start date. As transportation needs outpace revenue 3 to 1, MDT focuses on safety and preserving and maintaining transportation infrastructure as top priorities; in other words, keeping Montana's good roads in good order.

Join MDT in celebrating this month, and share what #GoodRoads mean to you! **See the footer on page 2 of this issue for information on how to connect with MDT on our social media channels.**

\*Find more facts about funding and Montana's roads in MDT's Fact Book: <https://mdt.mt.gov/publications/docs/brochures/factbook.pdf>

## Bicycling the Big Sky Map Updated for 2022

Gear up for summer adventure with MDT's updated *Bicycling the Big Sky* pocket map. This helpful resource is a companion to the Official State Highway Map and includes highway information for bicyclists, state laws and regulations pertaining to bicyclists and safety tips for sharing the road.

Additional bicycle and pedestrian safety resource materials are available upon request and include pamphlets on Montana bicycle and pedestrian laws, Share the Road bumper stickers, Walk and Ride Safe brochures for parents and children, helmet fitting information, the A to Z by Bike booklet, and traffic safety coloring books. You can request print copies of the map and other resources from MDT by email at [mdtbikeped@mt.gov](mailto:mdtbikeped@mt.gov).

To view an electronic copy of the *Bicycling the Big Sky Map* and additional bicycle and pedestrian program information, **scan the QR Code to the right** with your mobile device or visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/travinfo/bikeped/>.



# Stay Safe in Your Summer Travels



As residents and visitors head out to explore Montana, MDT is urging travelers to remember the serious nature of driving and join the commitment to Vision Zero – zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana roadways.

Memorial Day to Labor Day is known as the “100 Deadliest Days of Summer” due to increased traffic deaths nationwide. At other times of the year, the nation often travels less – either by choice or limiting factors such as season or weather conditions, and travelers stay closer to home and use increased caution while driving. However, the summer months bring clear roadways and better weather, lowering drivers’ guards. Combined with an increase in traffic volumes due to summer travel, these conditions lead to increased crashes and deaths involving cars, trucks, motorcycles, ATVs, pedestrians, and bicycles.

As of May 31, 2022, 54 deaths have occurred on Montana roads, compared to 82 at the same time in 2021. While this is an encouraging reduction in fatalities, even one is unacceptable. The contributing factors of speed, not wearing a seat belt, and impaired driving, continue to lead to more lives lost on our roadways. Montanans need to do their part in staying safe, whether traveling across town or the state.

Higher summer traffic volumes can contribute to the severity of highway crashes, and drivers need to remember that crashes – including severe and fatal crashes – don’t just happen on the highway. When traveling in town, on unpaved roads, as well as on the highway, all drivers, riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians must take care to be safe along their journey. Drivers should always:

- Follow posted speed limits.
- Be rested and give full attention to driving.
- Keep their vehicle in safe running condition.
- Scan their travel area for safety hazards such as wildlife and debris. Expect the unexpected.
- Buckle up and drive sober.
- Share the road. Watch for motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicyclists.

We all have at least one reason to reach our destination safely. The impact of losing just one person to a preventable motor vehicle crash is devastating for family, friends and communities. If we all remember at least one reason to buckle up, watch our speed, arrange a sober ride, and drive distraction-free, we can all arrive safely at our destination. See MDT’s website on Vision Zero and One Reason:

[www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/onereason/default.aspx#sober](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/visionzero/onereason/default.aspx#sober)

MDT is committed to safe engineering and maintaining Montana highways. For more information about Vision Zero, contact Janet Kenny at 444-7417 or [jakenny@mt.gov](mailto:jakenny@mt.gov).

# Motorcycle Safety Tips for Summer Travel in Montana

Montana’s scenic views make it an ideal place for motorcyclists to “hit the open road” when warm weather arrives and it is important to remember that we all share Montana’s roadways and safe behaviors like observing the speed limit, staying alert and only driving sober can mean the difference between a memorable summer ride and the tragedy of life lost on our roads.

Preliminary numbers for 2021 indicate there were 25 motorcycle fatalities in Montana, representing almost 12% of the total fatalities for the year. Of those fatalities, 16 were unhelmeted, or 64%. These numbers were down slightly from 2020, however, motorcyclists remain an at-risk group for crashes and fatalities in Montana.

“Motorcycles are some of the most vulnerable vehicles on the road,” said Jim Morrow, director of Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety (MMRS). “It is very important for drivers to remember that a motorcycle has all the rights of the road as any other motorist.”

Each spring, MDT coordinates annual media and messaging for Motorcycle Safety Awareness Month (May) through National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) funds. These activities are an example of MDT’s “Education” focus area of Vision Zero – the goal of achieving zero deaths and zero serious injuries on Montana’s roadways. MDT and NHTSA offer the following tips to drivers and riders on how to safely share the road and prevent a fatal crash.

## Tips for drivers:

- **Stay Alert.** Keep your full attention on driving and avoid distractions.
- **Stay Back.** Allow the motorcycle the full width of a lane at all times and allow more follow distance—three to four seconds—when behind a motorcycle, which gives them more time to maneuver or stop in an emergency.
- **Stay Aware.** Check all mirrors and blind spots for motorcycles before changing lanes or merging with traffic, especially at intersections, and always signal your intent.

## Tips for motorcycle riders:

- **Stay Safe.** Take a motorcycle safety course (<http://motorcycle.msun.edu>), never ride distracted, and wear reflective or brightly colored protective gear and a DOT-compliant helmet.
- **Stay Visible.** Ride in the middle of the lane where you will be more visible to drivers. Use hand and turn signals at every lane change or turn. Use caution and slow down when approaching left turns or intersections.
- **Stay Lawful.** Obey all traffic laws and be properly licensed. Observe speed limits, and never ride impaired.

In addition to these tips, keep in mind that Montana has a new law allowing the practice of lane filtering (**see the call-out box below for more information**). Drivers should also be aware of this change, and continue to look for motorcycles while keeping their full attention on driving. For more information on MDT’s Motorcycle Safety Program, contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or [scozzie@mt.gov](mailto:scozzie@mt.gov).

## NEW LAW: Lane Filtering Legal in Montana

**Did you know?** Lane filtering for motorcycles is legal in Montana, per the passage of SB9 by the Montana State Legislature in October 2021. The new law defines lane filtering as “the act of overtaking and passing another vehicle that is stopped or travelling at a speed not in excess of 10 miles an hour in the same direction of travel and in the same lane.” Drivers and riders can learn more about the law (MCA-61-8-392) at [https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title\\_0610/chapter\\_0080/part\\_0030/section\\_0920/0610-0080-0030-0920.html](https://leg.mt.gov/bills/mca/title_0610/chapter_0080/part_0030/section_0920/0610-0080-0030-0920.html). Help us share the goal of Vision Zero by always safely and legally sharing the roadway with other users!

# Rural Road Safety Awareness Week 2022



**W**hat is unique about rural road safety? Which safety countermeasures are best for rural roads? Is rural road safety a public health issue? These and other questions will be answered in this year's Rural Road Safety Awareness Week (RRSAW), July 18-22, 2022!

The National Center for Rural Road Safety – the premier national hub for rural road safety training, resources, and technical assistance – has announced its theme for this year's Rural Road Safety Awareness Week. It's all about **"Taking Action, Saving Lives."** The center's mission is to equip rural practitioners to overcome the unique safety challenges they face, so each day will promote a safety topic that is customized for rural audiences.

The themes are:

- ⇒ **Monday:** What's Unique About Rural Road Safety?
  - ⇒ **Tuesday:** The Safe System Approach for Rural Roads
  - ⇒ **Wednesday:** Proven Safety Countermeasures for Rural Roads
  - ⇒ **Thursday:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for Rural Road Safety
  - ⇒ **Friday:** The Intersection of Rural Road Safety and Public Health
- "We are working on free, downloadable campaign materials for others to share," said Jaime Sullivan, Director of the center. "This year's campaign is all about real-world rural practitioners and helping them save lives. Stay tuned!"

Stay connected with the National Center for Rural Road Safety on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter, and keep an eye out for the campaign! Learn more about the center and rural road safety at <https://ruralsafetycenter.org/>.

## Montana Traffic Safety Dates

⇒ **May 23, 2022 - June 6, 2022\***

Click It or Ticket Law Enforcement Seat Belt Mobilization (2022 STEP)

⇒ **July 1-5, 2022\***

4th of July Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Law Enforcement Impaired Driving Mobilization (2022 STEP)

⇒ **July 18-22, 2022**

Rural Road Safety Awareness Week (RRSAW)

⇒ **August 15, 2022 - September 6, 2022\***

Labor Day Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Law Enforcement Impaired Driving Mobilization (2022 STEP)

⇒ **September 18-24, 2022**

Child Passenger Safety Week (National Seat Check Saturday is September 24, 2022)

⇒ **September 19-25, 2022**

Rail Safety Week (Operation Lifesaver)

⇒ **October 1-31, 2022**

National Pedestrian Safety Month

*\*Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (STEP) Mobilization Periods*

**Note:** A total 428 hours were worked during the 2021 May Click it or Ticket Mobilization by 14 participating agencies. A total of 789 citations and warnings were issued during this mobilization. A total 686.5 hours were worked during the 2021 Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over Labor Day Mobilization by 13 participating Agencies. 1,877 citations and warnings were issued during this mobilization. For more information, contact Sheila Cozzie at [scozzie@mt.gov](mailto:scozzie@mt.gov) or 444-7301.

# MDT and FCCLA Celebrate Continued Success of Traffic Safety Partnership

**F**or the seventh year in a row, MDT partnered with Montana's Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) to promote teen traffic safety. FCCLA is an organization for students in Family and Consumer Sciences education through grade 12. There are 65 chapters across Montana.



2021-2022 1st Place grant award winners, Three Forks High School

Teen drivers represent approximately 10% of all fatalities and 22% of Montana's total serious injuries, yet teens only account for approximately 6.7% of the state's population. As part of the Vision Zero goal, MDT has made this issue a priority by continuing partnerships with organizations like FCCLA.

To help fund this project, MDT successfully applied for a \$18,000 grant through Ford Driving Skills for Life (Ford DSFL), a grant tied to teen speeding issues. Local FCCLA chapters that completed an application and scored well during the ranking part of the process received grant funds to support their traffic safety projects. Ford DSFL funding was then distributed to seven chapters throughout the state, ranging in amounts from \$340 to \$750. These chapters also received National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) funds ranging from \$300 to \$3,750, making the total funding awarded \$15,930. As in past years, the grant budgeted prize award money that went to the chapters with the best projects. The 2021/2022 school year grant prizes were awarded as follows:

- **1st Place** – Three Forks High School (\$2,500)
- **2nd Place** – Medicine Lake (\$1,500)
- **3rd Place** – Jefferson County (\$1,000)

Prizes were awarded during the Statewide Leadership conference held in March. MDT was also able to award \$1,000 to the other four participating chapters for their efforts.

MDT is excited to continue this partnership for the 2022/2023 school year, and applauds the efforts of the teens involved to educate their peers on traffic safety issues in Montana.

For more information, contact Sheila Cozzie at 444-7301 or [scozzie@mt.gov](mailto:scozzie@mt.gov).

Pictured at right from top to bottom: 2021-2022 2nd Place grant award winners, Medicine Lake High School; 2021-2022 3rd Place grant award winners, Jefferson County High School



## Leave Sooner Drive Slower - Live Longer



## National Perpetual Pavement Award Presented to MDT

On February 17, 2022, the Asphalt Pavement Alliance (APA) presented the Perpetual Pavement Award to MDT staff and the Transportation Commission. This award is the fifth to be awarded to MDT and recognizes US Highway 2 (US-2) from milepost 611 to 626 for Perpetual Performance. Located in Roosevelt County, this section of US-2 presents a number of challenges to MDT staff in ensuring pavement performance due to widely varying temperatures across seasons and impacts of weather in the region. It was earned by MDT in 2019, however, the presentation was unable to take place due to COVID-19 impacts.

Congratulations to the MDT Materials Bureau and project staff for this well-deserved recognition of efforts to keep our state roads moving Montana forward!



## How is the Montana Aeronautics Division Funded?

Montana Aeronautics operations are primarily funded by aircraft registration fees (68%), which are assessed in lieu of all other tax on aircraft in Montana. One hundred percent (100%) of these fees go to division operations and are reinvested in aviation in Montana. None of these fees go to the Montana general fund, nor does Montana Aeronautics receive revenue from the general fund. The registration fees, and late fee penalties, are set by the Montana legislature and are due to the division by March 1 every year, or within 30 days of purchase of a new aircraft. Montana remains one of a few states with attractive registration fee rates, which continue to appeal to the aircraft ownership community. In fact, the fees have only been increased one time (as a result of the 2019 legislature as part of House Bill 661) in recent decades.

Other sources of revenue for Montana Aeronautics operations include pilot registration fees (1%), fuel tax revenue from aviation (15%) and automotive (5%) fuel sold in Montana, and other miscellaneous fees (11%). Some of those miscellaneous fees are generated from state airport hangar leases, safety and education training clinic tuitions, airport supply and parts sales, and publication sales. The automotive fuel tax revenue distributed to Montana Aeronautics reflects a portion of aircraft that burn automotive gasoline. There is a 5 cent per gallon aviation fuel tax in Montana: 4.5 cents per gallon fund the airport grant fund and the remaining .5 cents per gallon goes to division operations.

To learn more about the Aeronautics Division, please visit <https://www.mdt.mt.gov/aviation/>.

## A Year of Transitions for MDT's Research Section

The MDT Research Programs section saw a year of transitions. In one short year, nearly the entire section changed hands. Rebecca Ridenour is the new section supervisor replacing Sue Sillick, the long-term section supervisor who retired at the end of 2021 after serving MDT for 26 years. Kaia Rosen is the new MDT Librarian, replacing Bobbi deMontigny who accepted a position with the Montana State Library in September. Chad DeAustin is the Experimental Projects Manager and began in June of 2021. He replaced Craig Abernathy, who worked at MDT for 25 years. Rounding out is our long-time research consultant, Vaneza Callejas, who has been helping manage MDT's research projects since March 2020.

While change can be difficult, the Research Section is embracing the transition period as an opportunity to consider its future. We are seeking opportunities to influence change in processes where needed to keep pace with the trends in research. If you have questions or would like to reach out to MDT's Research staff, our email is [MDTresearch@mt.gov](mailto:MDTresearch@mt.gov).

## Yellowstone Airport – WYS can now be found on Facebook!

Yellowstone Airport in West Yellowstone, Mont. is the closest airport to Yellowstone National Park, located just two miles from the West Entrance and approximately 30 minutes from Old Faithful Geyser. With seasonal commercial service to Denver on United and Salt Lake City on Delta, WYS provides the most convenient access to America's first national park. Book your travel arrangements today into WYS!



For the latest airport happenings and updates, be sure to like and follow WYS on Facebook by visiting <https://www.facebook.com/wysairport/>, or scan the QR code to the right with your mobile device.



*A snowcat clears snow from the Beartooth Highway in April 2022. MDT crews work to clear this All-American Scenic Byway each year in coordination with crews from Yellowstone National Park.*

*Always #KnowBeforeYouGo and check the status of this seasonal route before traveling this summer!*



# Spans in Time: The Story of Browne's Bridges

By Jon Axline, MDT Historian

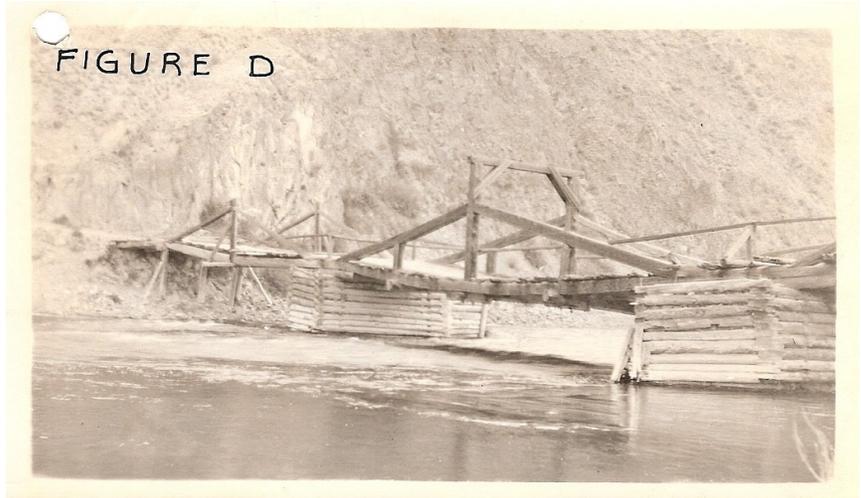
**D**uring the gold rush in the 1860s, private citizens built the first bridges in Montana. The potential to make a lot of money without having to work hard for it drove those first bridge builders. In 1865, the first territorial legislature passed a law that provided for the establishment of a system of toll roads and bridges. While most were taken over by the counties in 1872, county commissioners allowed others to collect tolls on their bridges until well into the twentieth century. A few, like Parsons Bridge south of Whitehall, became geographical place names, even though the bridges have been replaced several times over. Other than the names, physical traces of Montana's first bridges are rare. One particular bridge, Browne's Bridge, stands out, however. The history of the first structure, a toll bridge, is good as is the photographic record of the old span. The approaches to the old bridge are still discernable. Its replacement, a steel truss bridge built in 1916, retains the original name and is significant in its own right. It is the oldest Montana State Highway Commission-designed bridge still standing.

In 1865, miners Fred Burr and James Minesinger formed the Big Hole River Bridge Company and obtained a license from the second territorial legislature to build a toll bridge on the road between Bannack and Deer Lodge at this site. The license allowed them to charge tolls for the use of the bridge as long as they maintained it. Burr and Minesinger collected tolls until 1870 when they sold the bridge to Joe Browne, a miner and former vigilante. Both Beaverhead and Madison counties granted Browne the right to collect tolls in exchange for use of the structure. A native of either Pennsylvania or Virginia, Browne came west in 1859 with the Pike's Peak gold rush. After a few years of marginal success in the mines, he decided to try his luck at Gold Creek. When news of the gold strike on Grasshopper Creek became known, Browne headed south, taking up residence in newly established Bannack. He and a partner worked a profitable placer mine. Browne was a member of the vigilance committee that hanged the notorious sheriff and road agent Henry Plummer in January 1864. He served as a representative for Beaverhead County in the territorial legislature from 1869 to 1877.

Browne's family collected tolls from travelers for use of the bridge while Joe tended his 3,000-acre cattle ranch west of the Big Hole River. A fire destroyed the original bridge in 1872. Browne funded the construction of a replacement structure by selling his extensive mineral, fossil, and crystal collection. For a time, the bridge had a post office; Wells Fargo & Company ran a station at the bridge. After completion of the Utah-Northern Railroad in 1881, the bridge provided access to Browne's station for ore shipped from the Bryant Mining District in the Pioneer Mountains west of the river. The old bridge had clearly seen better days when Beaverhead and Madison counties jointly purchased the structure from Browne's son in 1911. In 1915, a fire seriously damaged the aging bridge. The counties condemned and closed the bridge to traffic.

In September 1915, the counties awarded a project to Missoula bridge builder O. E. Peppard to construct a modern steel structure to take the old bridge's place. The new Warren through truss bridge was designed by the first Montana State Highway Commission bridge engineer, Charles A. Kyle, in 1915. Unlike the old log toll bridge, which mostly accommodated heavily loaded horse-drawn freight and ore wagons, Kyle designed the new

steel structure for automobiles. The Dillon Examiner said the new bridge would "be of sufficient strength to bear the weight of a 20-ton steam roller and will be one of the heaviest bridges in the county, containing about 140,000 pounds of steel." Peppard diligently worked on the bridge through the winter of 1916. A steel shortage triggered by the war efforts of World War I caused the project to shut down for a few weeks in early 1916. Once the steel became available, Peppard completed the bridge in late March. A few weeks later, high water washed out the old toll bridge, which had become "a melancholy reminder of the passing of the old West and its pioneering men and their works." Perhaps ironically, the current Browne's Bridge is also a souvenir of an earlier time when automobiles were new to Montana's roads. Today, Browne's Bridge is the oldest highway commission-designed bridge still standing in the state and is on the National Register of Historic Places.



*Browne's Bridge as it appeared after being condemned by the counties in 1915 due to severe structural damage from a fire.*



*Browne's Bridge as it stands in present-day Montana. This structure is the oldest highway commission-designed bridge in the state and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.*

Alternative accessible formats of this document will be provided on request. Persons who need an alternative format should contact the Office of Civil Rights, Department of Transportation, 2701 Prospect Avenue, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620. Telephone 406-444-5416 or Montana Relay Service at 711.

**MDT Wants Your Comments on New Projects**

To receive a list of highway projects MDT plans to present to the Transportation Commission, please visit [www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed\\_proj.pdf](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/other/webdata/external/planning/proposed_proj.pdf) or [www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml](http://www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/stip.shtml), or call (800) 714-7296. You can mail comments on proposed projects to MDT Project Analysis Manager, PO Box 201001, Helena, MT 59620-1001 or email them to [mdtstip@mt.gov](mailto:mdtstip@mt.gov).

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MDT's mission is to plan, build, operate, and maintain a safe and resilient transportation infrastructure to move Montana forward.

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