

# Yellowstone County



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July 31, 2020

To: David L. Bernhardt, U.S. Department of the Interior  
Mr. Jeffrey Small  
National Garden of American Heroes Task Force Members

RE: National Garden of American Heroes

Dear Mr. Bernhardt, Mr. Small, and National Garden of American Heroes Task Force,

We, the Yellowstone County Commissioners, are pleased to provide this Letter of Interest and response to your charge for the development of a National Garden of American Heroes by the Executive Order of President Donald J. Trump. We strongly believe preserving our history and honoring our past is critical to current and future generations of Americans. The National Garden of American Heroes deserves a significant place in American History, and we can think of no better place to honor our past than in Montana among the beauty of the west including the mighty Yellowstone River, the longest free flowing river in the United States, running through our beloved valley, surrounded by the Rimrocks and views of the majestic Beartooth Mountain on the horizon.

Billings is the largest urban center in Montana, located in Yellowstone County. We are a regional business hub for over 500 miles and our medical community is home to two large hospitals. We have two Interstates I-90 and I-94/I-25 intersecting our 2,649 square mile County providing both an east-west corridor between Minnesota and Washington and north-south corridor from Canada to New Mexico for goods, services, and tourism. Billings Logan International Airport sits within five minutes of our thriving downtown with air service provided by major carriers with direct connections to Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake, Denver, Dallas, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Minneapolis.

Within a 15 minute drive of Billings one can be enjoying many public lands for outdoor recreation, hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and within an hour's drive of Billings one can be in the Absaroka Mountains enjoying the greatest scenic highway in the U.S., the Beartooth Highway taking you into Yellowstone National Park, our country's first National Park.

We have a robust history in Yellowstone County with the only physical evidence of Lewis and Clark's expedition preserved at Pompey's Pillar with Captain Clark's signature carved into the stone pillar along the Yellowstone River. This park showcases an interpretive Center for exhibits and education, trails and access to the river. Lewis and Clark also crossed the Yellowstone River directly south of Billings. The valley has significant importance to Native

Americans with Pictograph State Park, BLM designated wildlands, Four Dances, and near by Chief Plenty Coup State Park. We honor our history with a bountiful mix of both Native American culture and historical landmarks of the American West.

Yellowstone County would be extremely honored to assist you to achieve your appointed goals by providing an ideal location to preserve the history of this great Country, create a destination for tourism and education, and provide an area to reflect on the past and our long cultural evolution through to today.

Yellowstone County, Montana is the ideal location for the American Heroes National Garden. We can provide the respect and reverence our rich history so deserves. Attached to this letter, please find our proposal including the information the task force has requested. We respectfully ask that you consider our proposal for the honor of having the National Garden of American Heroes in Montana.

Respectfully,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Denis Pitman, Chairman

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Donald W. Jones

\_\_\_\_\_  
rstlund, Member

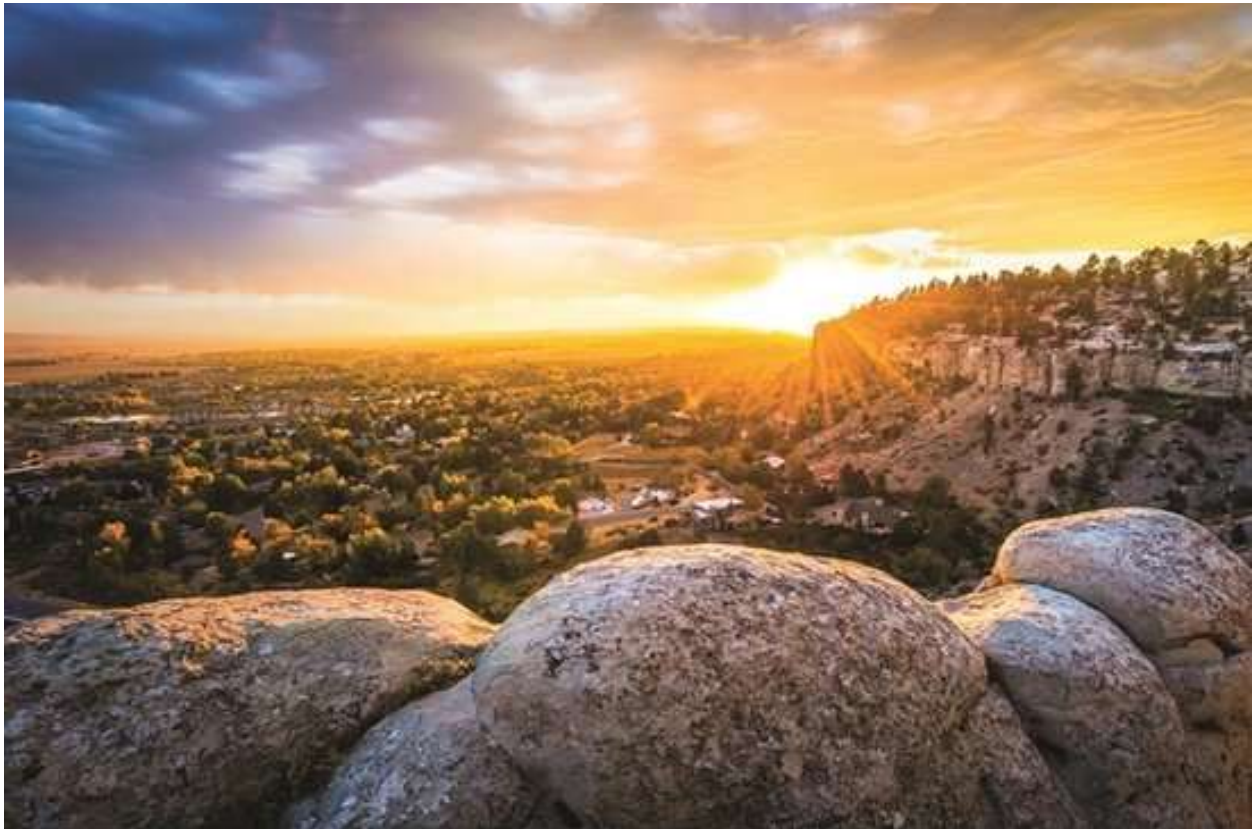
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## Proposal

# National Garden of American Heroes

in Yellowstone County, Montana

July 31, 2020



### **Yellowstone County Overview**

Montana was founded on fierce independence, the Native American and Mountain Man spirit, and down to earth farmers and ranchers who nurture and treasure the land. Our nation's history is full of fierce, brave individuals that have shaped our past and lead the way to our future. One must learn, understand, find common ground, and embrace the past to truly appreciate our nation's path forward.

Yellowstone County, Montana is the heart of the Big Sky State. The County covers 2,649 square miles and is the most populous county in the State of Montana. The United States Census shows the 2019 estimated population as 161,300. Billings is the regional medical and business hub for a 500-mile radius drawing people from across Montana, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota.



Billings is the largest urban center in Montana, located in Yellowstone County. We are a regional business hub for over 500 miles and our medical community is home to two large hospitals. We have two Interstates I-90 and I-94/I-25 intersecting our 2,649 square mile County providing both an east-west corridor between Minnesota and Washington and north-south corridor from Canada to New Mexico for goods, services, and tourism.

Billings Logan International Airport sits within five minutes of our thriving downtown with air service provided by major carriers with direct connections to Seattle, Portland, Salt Lake, Denver, Dallas, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Minneapolis. With 55 hotels offering more than 4,500 sleeping rooms, Billings offers capacity for people to explore, learn, recreate, do business, and make memories. While the community is thriving, there is still plenty of room for adventure, business growth, expansion, and entertainment offerings.

## **Key Industries**

Key industries for our region that make us a destination both in State and out of State include Agriculture, Healthcare & Health Supply Chain, Tourism, Regional Headquarters & Back Office Operations, Financial Services, Data Centers & IT Services, Manufacturing, Warehousing Transportation & Logistics and Energy.

## **Education**

Billings is home to two major higher learning institutions with Rocky Mountain College and Montana State University-Billings and the two-year college, City College which offers two-year degrees and one-year certificate programs. The University of Mary and Walla Walla also provides classes in Billings Montana. Billings offers a wide variety of education opportunities that will meet the needs of eastern Montana.

Within a 15 minute drive of Billings one can be enjoying many public lands for outdoor recreation, hiking, camping, boating, fishing, and within an hour's drive of Billings one can be in the Absaroka Mountains enjoying the greatest scenic highway in the U.S., the Beartooth Highway taking you into Yellowstone National Park, our country's first National Park.

From the breathtaking beauty of nature, emersion in our Country's history, to first rate attractions in Yellowstone County or within a short drive, we have it all. World renowned Tippet Rise Arts Center brings performers and visitors from across the globe. We have multitude of museums and performing arts venues including the Western Heritage Center, Yellowstone Art Museum, Moss Mansion, Yellowstone County Museum, MetraPark, newly renovated and expanded Alberta Bair Theater, Arthouse, Babcock Theater, Billings Studio Theater, NOVA Center for the performing arts, Venture Theater, and The Billings Symphony.





Beartooth Highway and Summer Ski Area is just a short drive from Billings for the most amazing scenic drive in the United States which leads to Yellowstone National Park. The surprise of visitors to see an operating ski area during the summer, where our future Olympians train adds to the excitement. Below the Beartooth Highway in the Absaroka Mountains lies the Beartooth Nature Center, and Red Lodge Mountain Resort & Ski Area.



Along the Yellowstone River, guests and residents alike, enjoy many local parks and recreation areas as well the Bureau of Land Management's Four Dances Natural Area atop the sandstone rims looking down on the Yellowstone River.

Yellowstone County is home to several outdoor recreational destinations. Yellowstone Kelly's Interpretive Site, Swords Park, and Skyline Trail take in the City of Billings from atop the sandstone Rimrocks. Phipps Park is a natural area for hiking and biking. Lake Elmo State Park provides a reservoir for fishing, swimming, and boating in Billings. Billings is currently building a reservoir and recreation park to be completed in four years that will be ten times the size of Lake Elmo creating another regional tourist destination.



Heading southeast of Billings takes you to Big Horn Canyon National Recreational Area and Yellowtail Dam for camping, fishing, boating, and hiking. This area is also home to Chief Plenty Coup State Park, Pictograph Caves State Park, and the BLM Wild Horse Range including being able to visit Penn's Log Cabin and the Ice Caves.



Along the drive, one may take in the vast expanse of Little Big Horn Battlefield National Monument and experience the rich history of the high plains.



Located just east of Billings in Yellowstone County is Pompeys Pillar State Monument. This site has an interpretive center, trails, and access to the Yellowstone River.

The National Garden of American Heroes belongs in Yellowstone County nestled with all our Country's and State's rich history of the valley and mountains. The National Garden would be held in high honor and would complement the network of already developed historical treasures throughout the region. The community values our history and would welcome an additional commemorative site to preserve our nation's history.

#### **Locations of Natural Beauty**

These Federal and non-Federal potential site options for the National Garden of American Heroes have not been vetted, however, the provided short list shows there are many options for the placement of the National Garden of American Heroes.

Zimmerman Park- A county park located west of Zimmerman Trail with parking access south off Hwy. 3. This is a scenic, natural park area with numerous trails overlooking the City along the face of the Rims.

MetraPark- The premiere entertainment and event complex located in Billings with parkland for enjoying the beauty of the valley. It features a 10,000-seat arena, several expo buildings and a reflecting pond all situated on acres of land within five minutes of the airport.



Four Dances- In 1999, Yellowstone River Parks Association made an agreement with the Bureau of Land Management and the Montana Land Reliance to help support the Four Dances Natural Area. Four Dances Lies on top of the Rims south of Billings. Four Dances boasts peregrine falcon nesting sites, prairie environments, and the occasional rock wren.

Phipps Park- Phipps Park is a historic, scenic site featuring natural, undeveloped area with jogging/biking trails and a Frisbee golf course.

Swords Park- Swords Rimrock Park and Black Otter Trail feature historic sites, scenic drives, jogging trails, a bike path and underdeveloped nature areas.

Property on Rims- The Rimrocks (also known as the "Rims") are geological rimrock sandstone formations that outcrop in sections of Billings, Montana. Eighty million years ago the Billings metro area was the shore of the Western Interior Seaway, a sea that went from the present-day Gulf of Mexico to the Arctic North.

Yellowstone County is home to many parcels of Federal land that could potentially be the future site of the National Garden of American Heroes. A map of Federal land is included later in this document.

### **Local Statues or Monuments**

Frederick Billings- Frederick Billings made a name for himself during the gold rush, eventually becoming California's first Attorney General. Billings purchased one of the original twelfth interests in the Northern Pacific Railway and served as its president. As the railway expanded, his legacy left lasting impressions. So much so, Billings, Montana was named after him. A statue of Frederick Billings is located at the Western Heritage Center.

Lonnie Bell- Cowboy and radio personality. Lonnie's Bronze statue is located at MetraPark.



Dan Mortensen- Montana is home to the Cowboy Hall of Fame. Our local Cowboy, World Champion Hall of Famer, Dan Mortensen is recognized with a bronze sculpture at MetraPark.

**Other American Heroes (aside from 31 required) that should be included?**



Lewis and Clark crossed the Yellowstone in Billings. The Corps of Discovery was the first American group to undertake the journey, and its impact can't be underestimated. The expedition introduced Americans and Europeans to hundreds of varieties of plants and animals, met with dozens of native tribes and produced an accurately mapped out route to the Pacific Ocean. The expedition opened new territory for the fur and lumber trade and pointed out the best lands for future settlement and agriculture. It allowed a young country to blossom into greatness, because more land had equated to more resources and therefore, more power. The influence of the expedition is incalculable. For better, or worse, there is no doubt that the expedition of Lewis and Clark forever changed the course of the country's history.

Chief Plenty Coups- Plenty Coups (Aleek-chea-ahoosh, meaning "many achievements") was a man of war - and then a man of peace - whose vision has helped bridge a gap between two cultures. Recognized for his bravery and leadership, he was made a chief of the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe by age 28. He was the first Apsáalooke to own and settle on a farm. The Apsáalooke people voted to designate him as their last traditional tribal chief.

Joe Medicine Crow- Joseph Medicine Crow was a war chief, author, and historian of the Crow Nation of Native Americans. His writings on Native American history and reservation culture are considered seminal works, but he is best known for his writings and lectures concerning the Battle of the Little Bighorn in 1876.

Yellowstone Kelly- Luther Sage "Yellowstone" Kelly was one of the most notable American Veterans. Kelly was laid to rest in June of 1929 with full military honors overlooking the Yellowstone Valley.

Today, the Yellowstone Interpretive Site sits atop Sword's Rimrock Park and overlooks downtown Billings. The site serves as a memorial to honor Kelly's name and significant contributions.

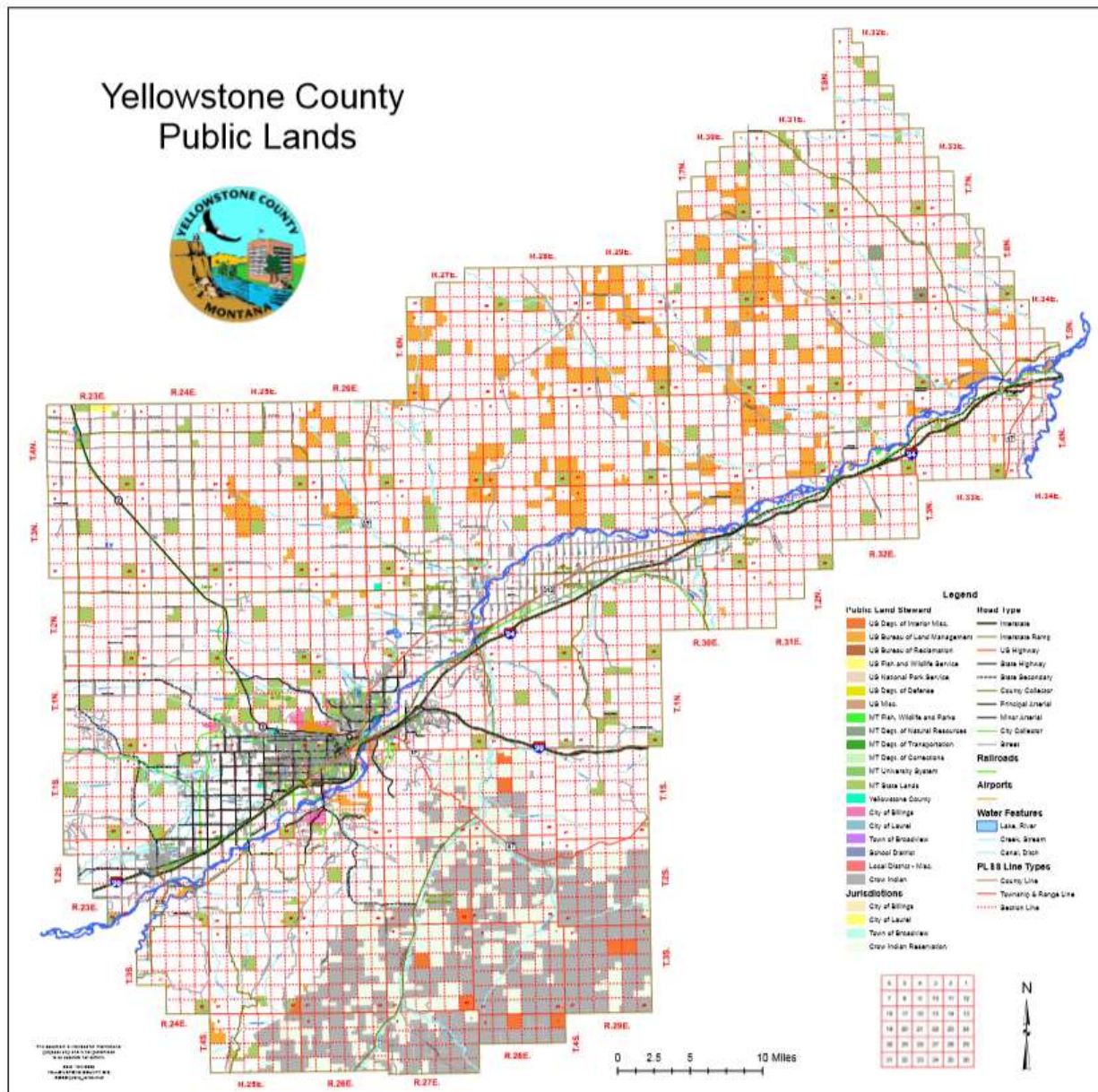
Buffalo Bill Cody- Buffalo Bill Cody earned his nickname by hunting and killing over 4,000 buffalo, and his status as an Old West legend was cemented with his traveling Wild West show. Born near LeClaire in Scott County, Iowa, in 1846, Buffalo Bill Cody rode on the Pony Express at the age of 14, fought in the American Civil War, served as a scout for the Army, and was already an Old West legend before mounting his famous Wild West show, which traveled the United States and Europe.

Charles M. Bair/Alberta Bair- Charles Bair came to Montana in 1883 from Paris, Ohio to make his fortune. He began as a conductor on the Northern Pacific Railroad. He ran sheep on a small ranch near Lavina, Montana and on the Crow Reservation in Hardin (where he became a close personal friend of the last great Crow leader, Chief Plenty Coups), but he made his fortune in the Alaskan Gold Rush- not by working a claim, but by investing in a ground-thawing device. He poured his earnings into oil, mining, banking and real estate interests and he purchased the John Grant Ranch in Martinsdale. Here he had one of the world's largest sheep ranch, at times running 300,000 head of sheep. In addition, Bair was a key figure in oil and coal exploration, served as a director and founder of Midland Bank in Billings, was involved in many irrigation projects, and played an active role on Montana's political scene.

James F. Battin- He was a deputy county attorney of Yellowstone County, Montana from 1953 to 1955, then general counsel and secretary of the City-County Planning Board of Billings in 1955. In 1955 he became an assistant city attorney of Billings and was the city attorney from 1957 to 1958. He served as member of the Montana House of Representatives in 1958 and 1959. Battin was elected as a Republican to the Eighty-seventh and to the three succeeding Congresses, and served from January 3, 1961, until his resignation February 27, 1969, to become United States District Judge.

### **Why Billings**

Our American Heroes must be remembered. Yellowstone County is the ideal location and welcomes the honor of being named the home of the National Garden of American Heroes. Yellowstone County provides a safe and inviting community where history will be revered and preserved for future generations in a setting of natural beauty, peace, and solitude for reflection. We strongly believe that preserving our history and honoring our past through the National Garden of American Heroes is essential for current and future generations of Americans. The National Garden of American Heroes deserves a significant place in American History, and we can think of no better place to honor our past than in Montana among the beauty of the west including the mighty Yellowstone River, the longest free flowing river in the United States, running through our beloved valley, surrounded by the Rimrocks and views of the majestic Beartooth Mountain on the horizon. Envision the statues of our heroes shining in the sun against the bluest of skies, being proudly recognized while overlooking the vast valley, the high plains prairie, with the Beartooth Mountains in the near distance.



### Links to Websites with Additional Information

Visit Billings Indian Country, <https://www.visitmt.com/places-to-go/indian-country.html>

Western Heritage Center, <https://www.ywhc.org/>

Yellowstone County Genealogy, <https://sites.rootsweb.com/~mtygf/county/yellowstone.htm>

Visit Billings State Parks and Monuments, <https://www.visitbillings.com/state-parks-national-monuments>

Visit Billings History Buffs, <https://www.visitbillings.com/history-buffs>

Outdoor Enthusiasts (Trails, recreation), <https://www.visitbillings.com/outdoor-enthusiasts>

MetraPark, <https://www.metrapark.com/>

Alberta Bair Theater, <https://www.albertabairtheater.org/>

Yellowstone Art Museum, <https://www.artmuseum.org/>

Tippet Rise, <https://tippetrise.org/>

Pompeys Pillar, <https://www.blm.gov/visit/pompeys-pillar-national-monument>

Little Big Horn Battlefield, <https://www.nps.gov/libi/index.htm>

Beartooth Highway, <https://www.visitmt.com/places-to-go/regions/experiences/beartooth-highway-scenic-drives.html>

Chief Plenty Coups State Park, <http://stateparks.mt.gov/chief-plenty-coups/>

Pryor Horse Range, <https://www.nps.gov/bica/learn/nature/pryor-mountain-wild-horse-range.htm>  
<http://enjoyyourparks.com/Pryor-Mountain-Wild-Horses.html>

Custer Gallatin National Forrest and Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness,  
<https://www.visitmt.com/listings/general/wilderness-area/absaroka-beartooth-wilderness-area.html>

Four Dances: <https://www.yrpa.org/parks/four-dances-natural-area/>

Yellowstone Kelly Interpretive Center: <http://yellowstonekelly.org/see-the-site/>

Western Heritage Center: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_Heritage\\_Center](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Heritage_Center)

Dan Mortensen- Cowboy Hall of Famers: <http://www.montanaprorodeo.org/monument.html>

Pompey's Pillar: <http://www.pompeyspillar.org/>

Little Bighorn Battlefield: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/battle-of-little-bighorn>

Pictograph State Park: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/pictograph-cave/>

Beartooth Highway: <http://beartoothhighway.com/wild-beartooth/>

Bighorn Canyon Recreational Area: <https://www.visitbillings.com/outdoor/bighorn-canyon-recreational-area>

The Billings Depot: <https://www.billingsdepot.org/history-depot/#:~:text=The%20Billings%20Depot%20was%20built,building%20and%20an%20office%20building.>

Lewis and Clark: <https://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-figures/lewis-and-clark6.htm>

Chief Plenty Coups: <http://stateparks.mt.gov/chief-plenty-coups>

Joe Medicine Crow: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe\\_Medicine\\_Crow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Medicine_Crow)

Custer: <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/george-armstrong-custer>

Wild Bill Hickok: <https://www.biography.com/personality/wild-bill-hickok>

Buffalo Bill Cody: <https://www.biography.com/performer/buffalo-bill-cody>

Charles M. Bair: <http://www.bairfamilymuseum.org/about-us/history/>

James F. Battin:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James\\_Franklin\\_Battin#:~:text=He%20served%20as%20member%20of,become%20United%20States%20District%20Judge.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Franklin_Battin#:~:text=He%20served%20as%20member%20of,become%20United%20States%20District%20Judge.)

# CROW TRIBE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

Bacheeitché Avenue  
P.O. Box 159  
Crow Agency (Baaxuwuashé), Montana 59022



**Alvin Not Afraid, Jr.**

CHAIRMAN

**Carlson Goes Ahead**

VICE-CHAIRMAN

**Rudolph Old Crow, Sr.**

SECRETARY

**Shawn Backbone**

VICE-SECRETARY

## LETTER OF SUPPORT *NATIONAL GARDEN OF AMERICAN HEROES*

COMMISSIONER OSTLUND,

I would like to display my full support of the National Garden of American Heroes.

As a United States Marine, I can appreciate the value of preserving our American story. Additionally, I believe our members will deeply appreciate these efforts, as countless generations of Crow lives and families have been dedicated to the protection of our Nations.

My administration is in full support. Please, feel free to contact my office at any time.

A'ho.

*Alvin Not Afraid, Jr., Chairman*