

Memorandum



TO: Mike Brodie, P.E., WGM Group
FROM: Christopher Bradley, Economist, Montana Dept. of Labor & Industry
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DATE: October 25, 2017
SUBJECT: Sanders County and Thompson Falls Economic Situation

As part of the preliminary engineering report for the Ainsworth Field Park Project, the WGM Group has requested economic information from the Department of Labor & Industry on the project area. This memorandum provides employment and wage data for Sanders County and Thompson Falls, MT (the smallest geographic areas around the project) with recent employment and wage data available.

In 2016, Sanders County's unemployment rate was the third highest among all Montana counties. At 7.8%, Sanders County's unemployment rate is above Montana's statewide rate of 4.1% and has been since 1990, the earliest year with data available. The historic above average unemployment rate reflects a persistent need for improved employment opportunities.

The following information provides an overall picture of Sanders County's employment situation for 2016, the most recent year with data available:

- The labor force consisted of 4,748 people, 4,377 of whom were employed with about 371 unemployed persons seeking work.
- As of 2016, Sanders County employment has not yet returned to its pre-recession high, which the state achieved in 2013. However, roughly 150 jobs were lost due to the closure of a private education institution. This closure was not due to economic reasons, and when excluding this employer from the analysis the jobs are roughly even with prerecession levels.
- 2016 was a good year for Sanders County's economy, with approximately 60 new jobs added, but above average unemployment rates demonstrate a continued need for momentum in hiring and economic development.

Job losses in the Construction and Manufacturing industries were the primary impacts of the recession. As of 2016, Sanders County has yet to recover a combined 211 jobs between the two industries combined. During the recovery, job gains have come from the Healthcare and Accommodation and Food Services industries with minor increases in the Mining Industry as well.

As the county seat and largest city of Sanders County, Thompson Falls plays a large role in the county's overall economy. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's OnTheMap tool, Thompson Falls had approximately 499 payroll jobs within city limits in 2015, 20% of Sanders County's total payroll employment. Jobs associated with the construction of a new park would be beneficial to the county and may provide workers who have yet to be reemployed in the Construction industry an opportunity to work.