

TESTIMONY OF DOUG CRACHY
COMMISSIONER, POWELL COUNTY, MONTANA

BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND VISITATION
AT LESSER-KNOWN NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM UNITS
AUGUST 8, 2019

Powell County originated by being split off of Deer Lodge County in 1901. The county seat of Powell County is Deer Lodge. Agriculture has been and still is the main economic business in Powell County. Mining was a major industry in the county until approximately 1990 when the last major mine, a phosphate mine, shut down eliminating many jobs. Another mine related business, the smelter in Anaconda, employed many Powell County residents.

Until the Milwaukee Railroad closed in 1980, a roundhouse was located in Deer Lodge, and employed many good paying positions.

Approximately 49 percent of Powell County is federal government owned, the vast majority being the U.S. Forest Service, minor percentages are BLM and Park Service. Logging in Powell County was a very active industry until the political and management climate curtailed almost all timber harvesting on federal land. Now the county must rely on SRS payments as a major funding source instead of logging as income from non-taxable federal land. One of the few sawmills left in the state is located in Deer Lodge, and it is still a major employer in the area, but the majority of the trees are not harvested in Powell County.

Deer Lodge is midway between Glacier and Yellowstone off of Interstate 90, one of the main corridors between these major national parks.

Powell County has many recreational activities that now attract people from both in and out of the state on Montana. Fishing is excellent on the Clark Fork, Blackfoot and Little Blackfoot rivers, Georgetown Lake, and many of the smaller streams and lakes in the county. Hunting is also very popular. Elk, deer, antelope, bear and predators are all able to be hunted locally. The northern portion of Powell County is in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, limiting economic activity to recreation. The Territorial Prison, constructed before Montana became a state, is located in Deer Lodge, and is a major tourist attraction for the area, along with the car museum, and the Hobby shop, which sells inmate produced items. The Continental Divide trail runs the length of the eastern boundary of Powell County. Powell County has acquired the old Milwaukee railroad bed between Deer Lodge and Garrison, a distance of approximately 8 miles, as a future extension to the Arrowstone park and trail system within the city of Deer Lodge. Hiking and biking trails are becoming very popular as a tourist attraction. A 9-hole golf course is located just outside of town, and the Jack Nicklaus designed Old Works golf course is just a few miles away in Anaconda. These activities are all draws that are available for tourists to enjoy along with visiting Grant-Kohrs Ranch. Powell County recently added a commercial kitchen to the Blue Ribbon Pavilion located on the Powell County Fairgrounds that has the capability of serving around 500 people. Obtaining functions at the pavilion also encourages attendees to also enjoy the other activities available as hiking, golf and Grant-Kohrs.

The Deer Lodge city-Powell county airport is in the process of being expanded with the assistance of the FAA.

Advertising is important, as tourists must be aware what is available, and having the area presented as an interesting destination to get them to stop and enjoy the amenities. Social media and web-sites are popular and widely used. Many tourists planning to visit Montana obtain brochures from the state tourism office. Being included in these brochures is a benefit.

Advertising in travel magazines and placing information at resorts, campgrounds and RV parks is also beneficial. The old standby of attractive billboards placed on the highways still bring attention to local attractions to travelling tourists tempting them to stop.