

1. LAND USES

Richland County is located in northeastern Montana, bordered to the north by the Missouri River and Roosevelt County, to the east by North Dakota, to the south by Dawson County, and to the west by McCone County.

Richland County encompasses 2,084 square miles (1,333,760 acres) of which 1,201,436 acres is land in farms and ranches. Sidney, the county seat, and Fairview are the only incorporated communities in the county.

Land Ownership

Land ownership in the county is predominately private. Public land ownership includes scattered state sections throughout the county (generally two sections in each township), and approximately 55,000 acres of federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (USDA, 1980). The BLM-managed lands are generally in the northern portion of the county.

Land Uses

Agriculture

Agriculture is the predominant land use in the county, as seen in Figure 1.2 “Vegetation Types.” Approximately 90% of the county’s land mass is in farms and ranches. In addition, there are agriculture-related industries such as the sugar beet processing plant and Anheuser Busch plant near Sidney.

Oil and Gas Development

Oil and gas development is evident in Richland County by location of wells and from the infrastructure used to access the wells, including roads, power lines, and pipelines. Once developed, the wells can operate in proximity to other operations such as farming.

Approximately 200 new wells have been drilled since 2000 when the Bakken field came into play. Although the exact extent of the Bakken potential is not entirely determined, current estimates are for another 200 wells to be drilled over the next few years. (Messer) The primary surface impacts of this energy production include impacts at the drill site (pads of a couple of acres each and tanks), transportation system impacts (vehicles, transportation of water, salt water, utility lines, and natural gas), and land use conversion for industrial purposes to stockpile and house equipment and supplies.



RICHLAND

County-Maps-Roads



- Road Type**
- Interstate
 - U.S. Route
 - Secondary
 - Montana Route
 - Street or County Road
 - Trail

CITY or TOWN

Population

- Under 50
- 51 - 1000
- 1001 - 2500
- 2501 - 10000
- Over 10,000

- Major River
- River
- Stream or Creek
- Intermittent Creek
- Lake & Reservoir



Miles

1:400,000

Roads from US Census TIGER file year 2000
Scale of data: appropriate for 1:100,000 scale.



County-Maps-Roads
MONTANA Natural Resource Information System
MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND WATER RESOURCES

Coal Mining

There is a coal mine west of Savage. The county has considerable coal reserves, but it appears that the most likely area for major coal development in the next 10 years is to the west in McCone County.

Cities, Towns, and Communities

Sidney, Fairview, Savage, and Lambert are the major communities in the county. Other smaller communities include Enid, Elmdale, Girard, and Crane. There are public schools in Brorson and Rau.

Many communities were developed and thriving at the time at the height of the homesteader era, but now many exist as a location on a map, with perhaps a few homes.

Residential development outside of existing communities (Sidney, Fairview, Savage, Lambert, Crane, Enid, Elmdale, Girard, Crane, Brorson, and Rau) is predominately scattered farm and ranch homes. Other than the main communities of Sidney, Fairview, Savage, and Lambert, there are only a handful of residential areas with public water and/or sewer systems, and nearly all of those systems are close to Sidney (e.g., Sidney-Circle subdivision).

Commercial and Industrial

Sidney is the commercial center of the county. Fairview has an active Chamber of Commerce and some downtown businesses including a motel, restaurants, and health clinic. Lambert and Savage also have some commercial development.

Outside of the established commercial areas, there is some scattered commercial development along the major transportation routes, particularly along Highway 16 and 200.

Industrial development includes Sidney Sugar, the Lewis and Clark Electric Generating Station, Busch Ag Resources, all of which are located in the Sidney area.

Transportation, Communications, and Utilities

Public transportation facilities in Richland County consist of highways, county roads and city streets, rail, and an airport facility in Sidney. Highways in the county are two-lane. There are over 1200 miles of county roads. Rail line through the county extends along the Yellowstone River and up to the Missouri River.

With the exception of major inter-county, interstate oil and gas pipelines, electric utility and communication lines are predominately aligned with existing road systems.

Recreation

Developed public recreation sites in Richland County consist of developed parks in Sidney, Fairview, Savage, and Lambert. Other areas used for recreational purposes

include state of Montana fishing access sites, wildlife management areas, and reservoirs.

Public lands in Richland County include state lands and federal managed by the BLM. Depending on access and type of use these lands may be available for certain types of recreation. Hunting is likely the major recreational use of these lands.

Surface Water

Perennial surface water includes the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. The Yellowstone River flows from southwest to northeast across the county's eastern portion. The Missouri River forms the northern boundary of the county. The Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers converge approximately 12 miles east of the Richland County-North Dakota border. Other major drainages include East Redwater Creek, South Fork of Lisk Creek, Hardscrabble Creek, Cherry Creek, Lone Tree Creek, Fox Creek, and Smith Creek.

Richland County and the incorporated communities of Fairview and Sidney participate in the national flood insurance program, which include Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) showing special flood hazard areas for the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers and for Lone Tree Creek through Sidney.

Fox Lake and Kuester Reservoir, both in the south half of the county, are the largest bodies of surface water. There are 80 dams in Richland County, none of which are on the Missouri or Yellowstone Rivers.

There is also a major irrigation system, including the Lower Yellowstone Project canal, that transports water to farmers during the growing season.

Land Development Guidelines and Regulations

Municipalities of Sidney and Fairview

Both Sidney and Fairview are incorporated. In Montana, municipalities are classified as "city" or "town" by population. Sidney is classified as a city, and Fairview as a town.

Sidney

Sidney reconfigured a joint city-county planning district in 2006 (See Figure 1.2 on page I-5 in the Overview section of the Growth Policy. The city-county planning district includes the city and a several square mile area of county land outside of the city. A Planning Board consisting of members appointed by the city of Sidney and by Richland County Commissioners is responsible for providing recommendations for planning related matters within the city-county district. The first city-county planning district was established in 1966. In 1981, with pressure for development from the oil boom of the late 1970s, the planning district was re-initiated to strengthen the planning capabilities of the two-mile area around the city. (Comprehensive Plan 1983) A separate city-county plan was prepared in 1980, and the area was also included in the Richland County 1983 Comprehensive Plan.

Sidney has a zoning ordinance and a board that serves as both zoning commission and board of adjustment. A zoning commission establishes and makes changes to the zoning ordinance. The board of adjustment reviews requests for variances and other appeals. Staff assistance for the zoning functions is provided by the city's part-time building permit inspector. The zoning ordinance was developed in 1980, and according to the building permit inspector is generally working fine. The zoning ordinance classifies land into the following basic use districts, which are displayed on a map in the City Council office:

R-1	Single Family Residential
R-2	One-Family and Two-Family Residential
R-3	Multiple-Family Residential
C-1	Mobile Home Single Residence
C-2	Mobile Home Park
B-1	Community-Highway Business
CLM	Commercial-Light Manufacturing District
M-I	Manufacturing and Industrial District
PUD	Planned Unit Development
F-P	Flood Plain District
A-O	Agriculture-Open Space District
A-P	Airport Influence District

There is no zoning in the city-county planning area outside of the Sidney city limits.

The city limits have been enlarged over time through annexation. The most recent annexation was in 2005 and brought a large residential and commercial area to the northwest (along Highway 16) into the city limits. Development that has occurred outside of the city limits does not generally correspond to city requirements and may require creation of special improvement districts to tax the annexed area for installation of specific requirements (e.g., streets). Development outside of city limits is also likely to be on much larger lots than what is typical for the rest of the city. Extending water and sewer facilities to these larger lots is more expensive than for more concentrated development. Across the state of Montana, however, it is the need for water and sewer systems that is one of the primary motivators for areas to request annexation into municipal areas. That was the case for the 2005 annexed area, which was in need of a public water system.

New development within the city's boundaries is limited by the lack of vacant lots. In order for Sidney to provide for a major new housing development, the city would need to extend its boundaries. Major factors for location of new development are cost of extending water and sewer. According to the Public Works Director, the logical locations for extending city boundaries are to the west and north.

The Planning Board is responsible for reviewing subdivisions within the city limits and making recommendations to the City Council, which is the official decision body. The city uses the same subdivision regulations as Richland County and is provided staff assistance from the Public Works Director.

The Building Permit Inspector is responsible for inspecting new buildings and proposed changes and additions to existing buildings to ensure compliance with applicable building codes and zoning regulations.

Richland Economic Development Corporation and Sidney Chamber of Commerce play strong roles in the generation of ideas and resources for central business district renovation.

Fairview

Fairview developed a city-county planning district in 2006 that extends up to approximately one-mile beyond existing town boundaries. Prior to that time there was no separate planning area for Fairview or surrounding area. The city-county Planning Board includes members appointed by the Town Council and by the Richland County Commissioners. The Fairview area was included in the county's 1983 Comprehensive Plan.

Fairview has a zoning ordinance. There is no current zoning commission or board of adjustment. Requests for variances are reviewed by the mayor. The mayor also inspects on building permit applications. The town clerk records permits issued under the zoning ordinances. There is no current zoning map. The zoning ordinance classifies land into the following basic use districts:

- 1 Residential
- 2 Commercial
- 3 Unclassified

There is no zoning in the city-county area outside of the Fairview town limits. There have been no annexations to Fairview in the past 25 years.

There is little potential for in-fill development within existing town boundaries. There is room for some commercial development along the highway, but residential lots are extremely limited. Major factors for location of new development are costs of extending water and sewer.

The Planning Board is responsible for reviewing subdivisions within the town's city limits and making recommendations to the City Council, which is the official decision-making body. The city uses the same subdivision regulations as Richland County.

Fairview does not have its own building permit inspector for inspecting new buildings and proposed changes and additions to existing buildings to ensure compliance with applicable building codes. The state is responsible for reviewing commercial development. There is no state inspection of residential buildings, other than for electrical. The state inspector is not located in Richland County. Local commercial operators have found distance and lack of communication with the state inspector to be a problem.

The Fairview Chamber of Commerce has played an active role in promoting development in Fairview. The Chamber was instrumental in placing the iron sculptures

on light posts and at the entrance to town. The Chamber is currently working on downtown revitalization modeled after the national "Mainstreet" program.

County

Richland County re-initiated a county-wide Planning Board in 2006. The last Planning Board was formed in the 1980s and was responsible for the 1983 County Comprehensive Plan.

There is no zoning in Richland County outside of Sidney and Fairview city limits.

The Planning Board is responsible for reviewing subdivisions of lands less than 160 acres and for making recommendations to the County Commission, which is the official decision body for lands outside the jurisdictions of Sidney and Fairview. The county has Subdivision Regulations and a part-time County Planner to provide staffing assistance to the Planning Board and the Commission.

Richland County was the first county in the state to establish a building permit system. The building permit ordinance was adopted in the 1980s, after problems developed with an approved residential subdivision south of Sidney. At that time, the county adopted the Uniform Building Codes and requires building permits prior to construction of all commercial, industrial, and residential structures in the county outside of Sidney and Fairview. Currently there are three counties in Montana with building permit programs. The county has a part-time building inspector, the same person who functions as the building inspector for Sidney. (Hillesland)

Richland County administers floodplain ordinances outside of the jurisdictions of Sidney and Fairview. The Richland County regulations governing sewage treatment systems are county wide and address new systems, replacement systems, and alterations. (Logan)

Conclusions and Projected Trends

Agriculture will continue as the major land use in the county.

Exploration and development of the Bakken formation will continue over the next several years, resulting in more oil wells and related activity.

Demand for housing will continue. Major new residential developments in Sidney and Fairview would mean that the municipalities would need to annex additional land and expand and extend water and sewer facilities. Housing development that occurs outside of the municipal boundaries will likely continue to be on lots of one acre or greater to meet minimum requirements for individual wells and waste water systems. Developments outside of existing municipalities would not need to conform to any municipal requirements until such time as they might be annexed, creating cost burdens for lot owners.

Commercial development is being promoted in the central business districts of Sidney and Fairview. The success of these efforts will play a role in whether business locate in downtown or on the fringes of town and along highways, where scattered development can create traffic safety issues.