

May 26, 2026 Regular Session of the Beaverhead County Commissioners

The Board of Commissioners, in and for Beaverhead County, Montana, met in session on May 26, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. in the Commissioners Room of the Beaverhead County Courthouse. Present: Commissioner Michael J. McGinley, Commissioner C. Thomas Rice and Commissioner Support Specialist Dana Basile.

Pledge of Allegiance

At this time, those present recited the Pledge of Allegiance aloud to begin the day.

Updates on County Projects

Road Supervisor Bob Ferris was present and reported that they have been staying busy blading and patching roads.

The following Road Department Report was submitted and scanned into the minutes:

BEAVERHEAD COUNTY ROAD WORK
May 17th to May 23rd 2026
Dillon, Lima and Wisdom Areas

DILLON AREA

- Blade and Patch local roads
- Repairs and Maintenance
 - Road Check

WISDOM AREA

- Blade and patch local roads
- Equipment Repair, Pump Oil
 - Check Local Roads

LIMA AREA

- Blade and Patch local roads
- Checked Local Roads

Clerk and Recorder Stacey Reynolds, Facilities Manager Shonna Graham, Superintendent of Schools Mike Miller, Sheriff David Wendt, GIS Coordinator Tracy Sawyer, County Attorney Sky Jones, and County Planner Tina Caron, joined the meeting.

Sheriff reported that the downstairs population is at 15. They had a busy weekend. There was an accident that required a Life Flight.

Mike added that the rural schools are all out and Dillon will be done at the end of this week. He is working on reports.

Stacey commented that next week is the primary election. She updated for Joyce that a former employee passed away last week.

Shonna mentioned that last week they worked in the yard and landscaping. The fire extinguishers were checked and the first aid kit was updated. The doors for the court room were worked on and should be completed next week. The Public Health building will need new siding in the near future.

Tina updated that today she is submitting the SS4A grant. This week is a flood plain training in Twin.

Tracy commented that this is his last week, so he is cleaning and finishing projects.

Sky added that there is an intern helping in the office, and the new Deputy County Attorney starts on June 1st.

Commissioner Tom Rice commented about Commissioner Jackson resigning. He read John's resignation letter dated May 21, 2026. His last day was May 22, 2026. They are awaiting guidance from MACo and referencing MCA on how to proceed.

Discussion and Action-Appoint by Acclamation to Special Districts

Stacey Reynolds presented a list of trustees to be appointed by acclamation. The following resolutions were reviewed and adopted by the Commissioners.

Resolution 2026-16 Public Hospital District

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Lawrence Morrisroe for a three-year term. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 2026-17 Fire District #1/ Lima

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Leslie Duffner, Wayne Potter, and Richard Roden for three-year terms. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 2026-18 Fire District #2/ Beaverhead

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Roger Pelletier and James Watkins for three-year terms. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 2026-19 Fire District #3 Big Hole Valley

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Joe H. Johnson and Kathy A. Wise for three-year terms. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 2026-20 Fire District #4/ Grasshopper Valley

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Shelley Boyd for a three-year term. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Resolution 2026- 21 Fire District #5/ Wise River

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to appoint by acclamation Elizabeth J. Jones and Leo Smith for a three-year term. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Discussion and Action- Letter of Support for Drone-Based Cloud Seeding Operations in the Big Hole Basin

Jim Hagenbarth, Tom Welch, Francis Strodman-Royer, Dale Strodman, Jerry Turner, Gerry Godecke, Greyson Gee (virtually), JS Turner, Tina Caron, Stacey Reynolds, Theresa Eathorne, and Mark Boka were present.

Jim began the discussion with stating he would like a letter of support to be sent by the commissioners in regards to cloud seeding in Beaverhead County sent to government officials, DNRC, and director of Big Hole watershed committee. He briefly discussed cloud seeding and the program. The feasibility study was done in the upper big

hole which cost \$300,000 and was run by DNRC and National Science Foundation. Jim presented the findings of the feasibility study to the Commissioners and discussed it briefly, the next step is the pilot study to show the benefits. He also touched on the program in Idaho as well as a few different studies on toxicity review summary and conclusion on silver iodide in Idaho and across the US.

Commissioner Rice asked Greyson to add to Jim's discussion. Greyson introduced himself- he works for Rainmaker on cloud seeding technology. When used effectively can enhance the amount of snow in the areas focused. They are working in Idaho, Colorado, New Mexico, and others to implement cloud seeding. Dept of Interior and Bureau of Reclamation have funds available for this research. Rainmaker specifically uses drones for their program for the accuracy and precision.

Public Comments: Jerry added he is conflicted because cloud seeding works really well but he is concerned with silver iodide. The safety data sheet is concerning for its toxicity to aquatic life and lack of data on long term effects. There is more to it than making water. He agrees with the use of drones for precision and less waste in the atmosphere. He is asking the commissioners to do their research before they sign up.

Francis added she has questions for the commissioners to consider. Her family ranches in the Bog Hole valley and she is "adamantly against" cloud seeding. She would prefer no chemicals used and investigate the use of dams upstream controlling the release of snow melt to conserve water. She presented her research to the commissioners to review and the data of why she is against it. She discussed the aquatic life in danger, her home in the path of proposed cloud seeding and her ranch being affected. She also presented "cases when cloud seeding has failed" and caused catastrophic flooding, ground toxicity, ect. She referenced the cloud seeding and a recent flood in Kerrville, Texas and lives lost. She does not wish to "mess with Mother Nature".

Gerry commented that she supports the rancher but wants to look at the unintended consequences. Rainmakers was the company that cloud seeded in Texas prior to Kerrville tragedy.

Greyson replied that he wishes all would look at the data and research from Texas that state cloud seeding had no effect on the Kerrville storm. They were cloud seeding further than 100 mile south of Kerrville and had ceased operations 48 hours prior to the storm. It is a "misunderstanding" that cloud seeding had anything to do with the Kerrville tragedy.

Rice commented that he would like to take time to review all the information proposed and put on the agenda in the near future to act on.

McGinley added that the feasibility study is online to review. He likes the idea of the program to answer the questions since DNRC will be in charge to get the data. He has been reading about it and there is controversy on both sides. He also added that the letter of support does not guarantee the project will happen, just shows the commissioners are in support of it.

A community member added that the Big Hole has been lacking moisture and the snow we have been getting has been low to no moisture. Since the cloud seeding in Idaho, the moisture has changed in the Valley over the last 20 years. There have not been enough studies done to see the long term. When you take something from nature, she takes it back in another way.

Jim replied this is why we need the study and not just say no. This would pass up the opportunity.

Francis added when they do the feasibility study, if they do it- they need to put monitors and study the WSA.

McGinley asked if there was a timeline on getting this letter. Greyson answered there is not a set deadline but the sooner the better. There is a meeting next week with the interior department.

Discussion ensued whether they can send the letter of support as it is not a guarantee but McGinley proposed to add that the ranchers of Big Hole are concerned and wish for public meetings on the matter.

Francis suggested there be a meeting in the Big Hole with DNRC and the ranchers.

Rice asked Greyson if they could add the concerns to the letter and he replied yes- the objective is to signal study. He added he welcomes the engagement of the community and the plan is to have ample opportunity to air concerns.

JS commented that if they use government funds does it need to go to a bid process and not specific to Rainmakers. Greyson added it depends on how the dept decides to use the funds. The letter states not exclusive to a specific entity to conclude the studies.

JS asked if there was an RFP process to select Rainmaker to work on this and if they followed rules of procurement with government funds. Greyson answered they have been in conversations with department of interior and they will put out the bid process when it is determined how they will spend the funds. The funds expire in September so they are encouraging them to put it towards cloud seeding.

McGinley would like to edit the letter to add in concerns from today's meeting.

Rice added the public meetings are important and they should take place. He would like it added to the letter.

McGinley motioned to sign the letter of support with mentioning the context of today's meeting. Rice seconded to sign the letter. Motion passed.

Action on Previous Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the May 18, 2026, meeting were read and the following motion was made:

MOTION: Commissioner McGinley moved and Commissioner Rice seconded to approve the minutes as read. A verbal vote was taken and the motion carried unanimously.

Public Comments on Subjects Under County Jurisdiction Not on Agenda

New or Unfinished Business/Other Topics of Discussion

Stacey Reynolds presented the Commissioners with a recommendation to hire Kendra Devers as the new Deputy Clerk/Elections Assistant.

Routine matters occupied the attention of the Board for the remainder of the day.

Payment of Invoices

Ck# 220387 Montana Aeronautics Division \$124,240.31 (Pay off reconstruction loan)

Ck# 220388 Jeremy Sepanski \$7.65 (Inmate Funds)

The Commissioners reviewed and approved invoices for a total of \$84,229.83 beginning with check #220389 and ending with check #220419. The Invoice Payment Schedule is located in the Financial Administrator's Office.

The Commissioners reviewed and approved payroll warrants for the pay period April 19, 2026- May 16, 2026 in the amount of \$153,342.01, beginning with check # 037705 and ending with check # 037715. The payroll reports are located in the Human Resources office.

Public Comments on Subjects Under County Jurisdiction

Adjourn There being no further business to come before the Board; the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Attest: 
Clerk of the Board

Approved: 
Chairman of the Board