

July 15, 2026

The Lincoln County Board of Commissioners met for a regular session on July 15, 2026, in the Lincoln County Annex, Eureka, Montana. Present were Commissioner Teske, Commissioner Duram, Commissioner Hammons, County Administrator Matt Williams and Clerk and Recorder Corrina Brown.

Zoom participation: Alaena Woody, Brian Berreman, Dallas Bowe, Darren Short, Dean Riley, Jesse Haag, Katie Anderson, Michelle Bianco, Neil, Ray Stout, Roland Jorgenson, Scott Shindledecker, Tim Thompson, Tom Tokos, Tony Wickham and Wendy Drake.

10:01 AM **Administrative Issues/Old Business: Approve Minutes. PILT Claims. Commissioners' Report:** Present were Bert Miller, Duane Yoder, Judy Deleon, Justin Burich, Kristin Smith, Lavern Hostetler, Michelle Cobb, Thomas Lane, Tom Maxwell and Traci Street.

- Approval of regular meeting minutes: **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to approve the July 8, 2026, meeting minutes. Second by Commissioner Hammons. No public comment. Motion carried.
- PILT claims: none
- Commissioners' Report:
 - Commissioner Duram reported attending the Forest Wood Products Roundtable in Missoula. The meeting included updates on legislative issues and access topics.
 - Commissioner Teske attended the Hardrock Mining Impact Board meeting in Butte, where updates were provided on mining exploration projects and rare earth mineral extraction.

10:15 AM **Public Comment Time Non-Agenda Items:** Present were Bert Miller, Duane Yoder, Judy Deleon, Judy Hall, Justin Burich, Lavern Hostetler, Michelle Cobb, Thomas Lane, Tom Maxwell and Traci Street.

Tim Thompson spoke regarding the status of the proposed 20-site RV park at Bull Lake and inquired about final approval. The Commission relayed that the application is on next week's agenda and he was directed to Planning for an update.

10:30 AM **Bid Opening for Pit Material and Hauling:** Present were Bert Miller, Carole Johnson, Duane Yoder, Jean Sanders, Judy Deleon, Judy Hall, Justin Burich, Lavern Hostetler, Michelle Cobb, Stuart Hall, Thomas Lane, Tom Maxwell and Traci Street.

Two bids were received for pit material and hauling. Bid prices included Pit Run at \$7.00/ton (Thompson) and \$7.50/ton (Noble), 1½" Crush at \$11.50/ton (Thompson) and \$9.75/ton (Noble) and Class 4/5 Rock at \$40.00/ton (Thompson) and \$31.50/ton (Noble). The County Engineer will review the complete bids, verify that the proposed material sources are SHPO-approved and provide a recommendation for award at a future meeting.

10:45 AM **Public Hearing – Intent to Create the West Kootenai Rural Fire District:** Present were Bert Miller, Carole Johnson, Duane Yoder, Jean Sanders, Joel Young, Judy Deleon, Judy Hall, Justin Burich, Lavern Hostetler, Margaret Truman, Michelle Cobb, Stuart Hall, Thomas Lane, Tom Maxwell and Traci Street.

Commissioner Teske opened the public hearing regarding Resolution 2026-18, a resolution of intent to create the West County Rural Fire District.

Judy Hall: my first comment was before we even had the West Kootenai volunteer fire company. Um there was no fire insurance up there, no fire coverage for insurance purposes at all because there was nothing. Since the company was formed, they were able to get a nine rating, which brought a lot of insurance costs down for people. In fact, one lady said it brought it down over 300 a year and she said she's keeping half and giving half to the fire company, and she did that until her passing. So that is a super plus for having and maintaining the fire department up there. So, my husband Stuart and I were involved with the West Kootenai Fire Protection Company since the first meeting in February of 2005. Stuart was one of the original board members and I helped write the bylaws, do the paperwork for the nonprofit status. I wrote grants. I was a firefighter and I worked on many fundraisers. In addition to being an original board member, Stuart also became the fire chief three months after the fire department was formed. That being said, I can say we are vested in the best possible outcome for WKFPC. We want them to be a fire district. There have been many other community members and several of them are here now who have worked amazingly long hours volunteering their time to make the WKFPC better every year. I wish there was time to thank everyone individually, but for now, thank you all. You have brought us far. Those of you who are here, when the WKFPC was first established, there were less than 180 homes in the area. We now have over 300 homes that are recognized as homes. This does not count the tiny homes, the mobile homes, and the off-grid homes that have been built since the last probably seven years. And the reason I say recognized homes is because those other ones, some of them, many of them are not even on the tax records. So, this growth need has outgrown us. There's just way too many people. Our funding is by community volunteer donations and a lot of fundraisers that cannot sustain us. While Stuart was the fire chief. I completed the NFIRS, which is the National Fire Incident Reporting System. It's one that you have to report every fault to what it was. During that time, we lost one home, but we saved nine. This doesn't count the Caribou fire where at least four homes were saved thanks to the volunteers that were out there fighting the structures, keeping the structure area safe, and we know of at least four that were saved. The West Kootenai Fire Department also responds to medical emergencies and has since day one. We do have EMRs, EMTs and Eureka volunteer ambulance thanks to our fire chief who was now stationed up in the West Kootenai. We cannot continue to plan on all of our funds coming from our generous donors. For one thing, we don't get grants. There are grants that we simply cannot apply for because we're not part of a taxing unit. We are recognized by the state, but we are not a taxing unit and therefore many grants exclude us. So, I just urge you to please vote yes.

Margaret Truman: I'm not in opposition at all and I think that they do a really good job. I believe that and I don't know enough probably about it that people who have larger acreages um may unduly carry more of the burden in regard to this

and not necessarily more structures that need to be protected. Um, so I would wonder if there if a flat fee may be considered versus a percentage and I don't know where that all stands. Commissioner Teske will look into this.

Commissioner Duram read public comment submitted by Forest Spence and Colin Crofts. The comment stated: “Good evening. After review of the petition, it was found there are some signatures from old residents who sold their property and do not own property more within the proposed district. We would ask for a better review of the petition. We also believe the petition should follow the rules of petitions in local referendum proposals, which require each signature to be notarized by a notary public. This is required for opposition in a voter led referendum people's vote, so it could easily be argued that the initial petition should require the same. See Montana Title 7 Local Government 7-5-132. It is good to have accountability in the democratic process. We would support the formation of a fire district if: 1) it is a fixed \$100 annual tax per landowner and the tax can only be raised by a vote of registered resident voters; 2) any paid position will have to be approved by a vote of registered resident voters; 3) the board and fire chief stay within the proposed budget and pursue all available grants; and 4) continue fundraising if lawful to do so. In our 250th year, let's not forget the power of the people. Also, please be transparent. There is a difference between transparency and protecting the interests of the county. We request this be read in Commissioners' Court tomorrow 7-15-2026, as we are unable to attend. Respectfully, Forest Spence and Colin Crofts.” Commissioner Teske will look into the legal questions.

Margaret Truman: if you present those questions to the county attorney, do you folks make the determination whether it will be a fire district or something other than that or it's as it was presented as the petition? Commissioner Teske clarified that the petition is specifically requesting the creation of a fire district, and if approved, that would be the form established. The current meeting is a public hearing to gather public input. Legal questions will be addressed, and if answers are received in time, the matter may be placed on the agenda for the following week with the goal of moving toward a vote. No action will be taken at this meeting; it is solely for hearing public comments.

I'd like to address if I can. My name is Justin Burich. I serve as the president of the board of director for the West Kootenai Fire Protection Company. Um couple things that were just brought up in that one letter I wanted to point out. One um an issue um that West Kootenai has versus other areas um in regard to having registered voters take action in regard to many different amendments. Um lots of members of the West Kootenai community do not have a legal voting status. the Amish community and Canadian members have a same uh holding of land ownership as anybody else and has a right to be able to sign the petition, which was the greatest aspect of the petition process. It allowed anybody that was an actual property owner to be able to sign and participate in that process. I'd just like to note that in the proceedings going forward to remember our community members up there that are not a legal voter but are a property owner able to participate in that process. Um to the best of our knowledge, we um did all the petition signing weekly with within the required uh inspect um for those homes that were supposedly admitted previous to them selling. The Cadastral has not listed any of those properties into the change of ownership. So, at this time, according to the Cadastral and to the public record, those names still hold. I have no problem with any review of any of those names. I just wanted to point that out. Thank you for your time. I believe in the entire four-month period, there was a total of five homes that are in the process or possibly could change hands. Again, we checked recently. None of them have shown up on Cadastral.

Tom Lane: I'll reiterate while we're here, just to be in support —as the current fire chief in West Kootenai—I have to emphasize the fact that I've watched our budget and how we've been working our budget through COVID all the way through now, and I have to reiterate that this movement forward is necessary to maintain and to continue the services that are provided in West Kootenai. Without this type of movement forward, grants that are not available to us would not be able to replace trucks. You guys are all already readily aware that we have replaced a truck recently by a grasp, and if it hadn't of been for some very astute location of a vehicle, we probably would not have a fire truck in the way we are. So, all of this is to try and get us in line with what the rest of the state and the country are doing and allowing public safety to work underneath the guidance of government so that we have the authority to make the decisions that we need to make. I'm not trying to look for more taxes, but we are trying to anchor it in the sense that it's owned by that community. That community can help us achieve what we need to achieve to keep stable as we move forward, including the increase in EMS, fire, motor vehicle accidents, and the terrain features that we have up there are significantly impactful by funding. I hate to say it that way, but that's how it works. In order for us to just keep doors open, our board members work tirelessly on events just to keep the lights on as the function they're doing right now. And that offset to that function would be having the tax base to keep the doors open and let our board work on the grants and the things that have already been outlined by the community and by our operating feature in the government and how we normally operate as a fire department.

Traci Street with Tobacco Valley News asked clarifying questions regarding the timeline, tax implementation and governance of the proposed district. It was confirmed that no decision will be made at this meeting and that the petition will return on a future agenda following review. She confirmed, if approved, taxes would be implemented subject to statutory assessment requirements, and the commissioners may appoint a district board similar to other fire districts.

Margaret Truman: if based on appraisals, is it a certain number of mills then that are associated with whatever that tax gives? How is that decided here? Commissioner Teske noted that additional information would be obtained regarding the specific process, as requirements vary by service area and district.

Justin Burich: if the vote is held, will this be a meeting most likely be in Libby? Commissioner Teske confirmed that the meeting would be held in Libby, with a Zoom option available for those unable to attend in person.

11:00 AM Bighorn Estates Phasing Plan Amendment/Extension Request. Castle Rock Subdivision. Meadow Peak SIA – Planning: Present were Doug Ecklund, Forrest Spence, Tiffany Ecklund and Traci street.

Kristin Smith presented a request to extend the Bighorn Estates Subdivision approval period and add phasing, with 26 updated conditions of approval. **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to approve the Bighorn Estates phasing amendment as

given. Second by Commissioner Hammons. Owner Doug Ecklund requested additional time for Phase 1 due to road construction delays. Planning agreed to this extension. Commissioner Duram **amended** his **motion** to extend Phase 1 to July 31, 2028. Second by Commissioner Hammons. Phase 2 expires July 31, 2029. No public comment. Motion carried.

Kristin Smith presented the Castle Rock Ridge Subdivision final plat for a two-lot subdivision. All conditions of approval have been met and Planning recommended approval. **Motion** by Commissioner Hammons to approve the final plat for Castle Rock Ridge. Second by Commissioner Duram. Doug Ecklund expressed concerns regarding fire mitigation between adjoining properties. Kristin noted fire mitigation was not a condition of approval and discussed available programs and resources for wildfire mitigation. No further public comments. Motion carried.

Kristin Smith presented a request to release the \$100,000 bond for the Meadow Peak Subdivision Improvement Agreement. The required improvements, including approaches and the fire suppression system, have been completed and approved by Fisher River Fire. **Motion** by Commissioner Duram to release the bond. Second by Commissioner Hammons. Discussion confirmed a cistern and approaches were in place. No public comments. Motion carried.

11:30 AM **County Administrators’ Report:** Present was Traci Street.

Matt Williams, County Administrator, provided his first administrator’s report, noting a positive impression of county staff and identifying opportunities for process improvements. He provided updates on the FY 2025 audit findings, investment review, technology projects, grant management, proposed policy resolutions and community outreach efforts. He also reported on developing new county apps, employee communication tools, Chamber of Commerce involvement and a submitted grant request to LOR Foundation for technology enhancements not budgeted.

11:46 AM **Adjourned**

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Brent Teske, Chairman

ATTEST: _____
Corrina Brown, Clerk of the Board