

## **PRESS RELEASE**

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Contact: Janice Brown

(406) 579-3853

[jbrown@yellowstonebusiness.org](mailto:jbrown@yellowstonebusiness.org)

### **Video Conference Explores Cross-Boundary Challenges Facing Greater Yellowstone Region**

On February 28 the Yellowstone Business Partnership (YBP) held a tri-state video conference that temporarily solved an all too common problem shared by residents of the Greater Yellowstone region: the challenge of collaboration between far-flung cities.

By linking participants in Jackson and Lander, WY; Pocatello and Idaho Falls, ID; and Bozeman and Billings, MT via video, YBP emphasized the importance of collaboration in approaching the common socioeconomic challenges they face.

According to YBP executive director, Janice Brown, the idea to connect the cities electronically was intentional: “winter is a difficult time for many to travel the long distances that characterize the Yellowstone-Teton region.” By keeping participants closer to home, YBP significantly reduced the carbon footprint such an event would normally produce.

What separates the six regions represented at the video conference are hundreds of miles and three state boundaries that often inhibit constructive problem-solving. The problems they share are rapid population growth, health care services for an aging population, affordable housing and workforce shortages, seasonal fluctuations in rural economies, and lack of inter-city public transportation.

The purpose of the video conference was to begin strategic economic planning based on the YBP report, *Turning on the Off-Season*, which thoroughly maps out the challenges facing the 25 counties that surround Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks. The principal investigator of the report, Dr. Larry Swanson of the O’Connor Center for the Rocky Mountain West, was the featured speaker. After a PowerPoint presentation by Swanson, participants signed off and began brainstorming “hot topics” for their region that eventually became a short list of potential projects.

With the help of a \$150,000 Rural Business Opportunity Grant from the USDA, participants were assured that their brainstorming efforts would result in an economic development project of their choosing. A second regional meeting will take place later this month, where each regional group will select one project from the short list for further research or analysis. Each of the six regional groups is allotted \$10,000 to conduct research and create action plans for implementation.

In addition, each team will send representatives to a regional forum to guide development of a “Concept of Operations” Transportation Plan to connect private and public providers across the three states. The Idaho Department of Transportation has provided \$30,000 to help ensure that public transportation for the region is addressed within the scope of YBP’s Seasonality project.

Joint meetings of all six teams are scheduled for the YBP annual meeting in May at Jackson Lake Lodge, where the focus will be regional transportation, and at the YBP Seasonality Summit in Cody October 6-7, 2008.

The next regional meetings are open to the public. Citizens, educators, business owners, and members of local agencies, chambers of commerce, professional organizations, and economic development groups that missed the video conference are encouraged to participate in the selection of a project.

For more information, call Jan Brown at 1-888-583-8283. To download a copy of the *Turning on the Off-Season* report or to review the mission, values, and membership of the Yellowstone Business Partnership, visit [www.yellowstonebusiness.org](http://www.yellowstonebusiness.org). In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability.

**For More Information on Regional Meetings in Your Area Contact:**

Billings Region (Yellowstone, Carbon, Stillwater, Sweet Grass counties in Montana; Park County in Wyoming): Barb Beck

Beck Consulting  
PO Box 870  
Red Lodge, MT 59068-0870  
406-446-3628  
[barbbeck@cablemt.net](mailto:barbbeck@cablemt.net)

Pocatello Region (Idaho's Bannock, Bingham, Franklin, Caribou and Bear Lake counties)

Kathryn DeMott  
Lava Adventures & Lodging  
PO Box 7  
Lava Hot Springs, ID 83246  
208-589-4441 cell  
[kathy\\_demott@yahoo.com](mailto:kathy_demott@yahoo.com)

Bozeman Region (Montana's Gallatin, Park, Madison and Beaverhead counties)

Susan Higgins  
7012 Lorelei Drive  
Bozeman, MT 59715  
406-209-3613  
[shiggins@montanadsl.net](mailto:shiggins@montanadsl.net)

Idaho Falls Region (Idaho's Bonneville, Jefferson, Madison, Fremont and Clark counties)

Wendy Green Lowe  
P2 Solutions  
545 Shoup Avenue, Suite 312  
Idaho Falls, ID 83402  
208-523-6668  
[wendy@p2-solution.com](mailto:wendy@p2-solution.com)

Jackson Region (Teton, Lincoln and Sublette counties in Wyoming; Teton County, Idaho )  
Jonathan Schechter  
The Charture Institute  
PO Box 4672  
Jackson, WY 83001  
307-733-8687  
[jonschechter@cs.com](mailto:jonschechter@cs.com)

Lander Region (Fremont and Hot Springs counties, Wyoming)  
Bill Sniffin  
Wyoming, Inc.  
453 Main St.  
Lander, WY 82520  
307-332-3111 X17  
[bsniffin@wyoming.com](mailto:bsniffin@wyoming.com)

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