

INTRODUCTION

This document has grown out of the East Helena Area Economic Adjustment Strategy (EAS) completed in 2002. The closure of the East Helena smelter in 2001 motivated the study as a way of finding new directions for the newly unemployed smelter workforce. One of the recommendations of the EAS was to form an Economic Development District under the auspices of the Economic Development Administration (EDA). An EDA prerequisite to forming an Economic Development District is the compilation of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). This allows the Economic Development District to qualify for assistance from the EDA for public works, economic adjustments and planning projects.

Soon after work began to form the Gateway Economic Development District (hereafter Gateway EDD) with its own 501(c)3 designation. In 2004 the CEDS document was submitted to EDA and in November of 2006, Lewis and Clark, Broadwater and Meagher Counties were designated as the Gateway Region. In March of 2007, Gateway Economic Development District received its first planning grant.

The three-county Region has an abundance of natural beauty, pristine water, and abundant wildlife. It is rich in mineral, agricultural and forest resources, but the economy has been hurt by the downturns in these industries. Area leaders are therefore focusing on diversification, business clustering and tourism. Problems and challenges exist and much needs to be done to meet the needs of the region and achieve the objectives and goals of the CEDS. The District encourages a regional approach to solving problems.

The 2008 Gateway CEDS provides guidance for local and regional planning. It builds upon established initiatives to create good paying jobs through business counseling and providing increased regional capital to businesses. In addition, it focuses on issues that enhance the quality of life for its residents in the three-county Region.

The guidelines adhered to under this CEDS include:

- Description of problems, needs, potentials and resources of the area;
- Presentation of the area's vision and goals;
- Establishment of the strategic direction for an action plan;
- Establishment of priority programs and projects for implantation; and
- Itemization of standards for the evaluation and update of the process.