

MINUTES April 8, 2026

New City Hall 3rd Floor County Commissioner’s Board Room & Virtual 9:07 am – 09:45 am

APPROVAL OF MINUTES as distributed [1st: Bob Lough with YARES; 2nd: Paul Totton with Coventry Ren]

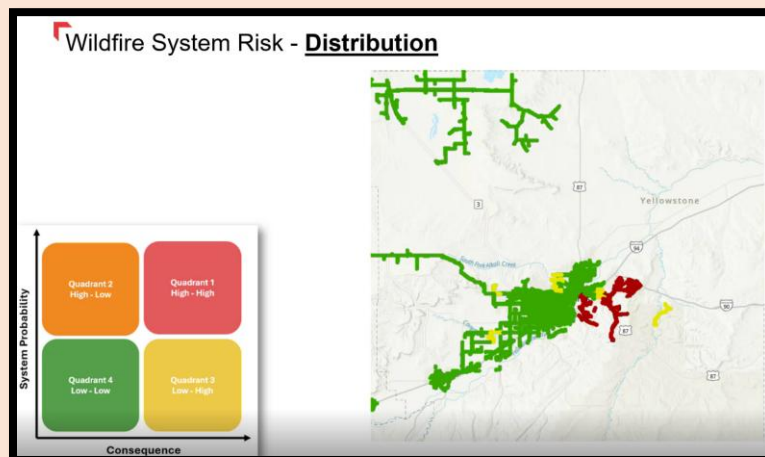
AGENDA – DISCUSSION:

Quarterly Financial Report: NEXT REPORT IN JUNE

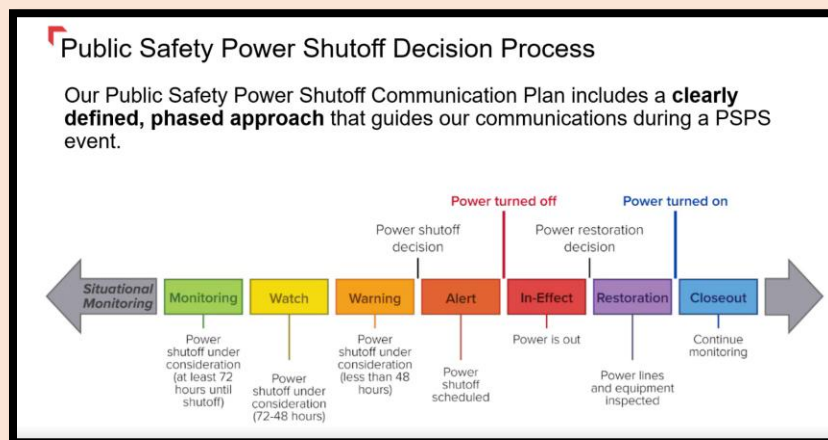
Member Presentation(s):

NorthWestern Energy

- Wildfire Mitigation & Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) Plan
 - PSPS is when a utility will de-energize (turning off power) specific sections of power lines to reduce the risk of lines sparking and causing wildfires.
 - Previously most commonly seen in California, Colorado, and Hawaii following large/historic fires.
 - Watching weather forecasts, high risk areas, switching high risk line sections from overhead to buried lines, and using wildfire watch cameras in critical areas to spot fires/smoke plumes faster all help reduce the risk needing to escalate to a PSPS.
 - Use of infrastructure resiliency risk modeling helps focus efforts to reduce ignition probability in high risk/high fuel/high structure density areas to further reduce having to implement a PSPS.



- Lockwood/Emerald Hills (red) has been assessed as being the most high-risk area (in Yellowstone County) facing a PSPS due to structure density, timber/fuel density, and access (limited roads, limited water supply, very hilly/steep terrain).
- Areas in yellow have had previous mitigation work conducted, but due to environmental factors (fuel, terrain, structure density, access, etc) remain at a higher risk than those areas coded/assessed in green.
- Wildfire risk mitigation path:
 - Grid Hardening
 - Enhanced protective maintenance, targeted grid hardening, vegetation management, and deployment of technology with the focus of reducing ignition potential.
 - Situational Awareness
 - Continuously monitor environmental conditions to make informed operational decisions. Deploy smoke detection cameras and weather stations for increased situational awareness.
 - Enhanced Powerline Safety Setting (EPSS)
 - Engineered enhanced protection and control settings during heightened wildfire likely conditions to reduce ignition potential.
 - System automatically shuts off in the event of a detected fault. Outside of EPSS, system automatically tries to clear the fault itself; during EPSS, system shuts off and does not attempt to clear the fault (requires a person to go out and manually clear the fault/repair before re-energizing the line).
 - Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS)
 - Measure of LAST RESORT
 - Proactive de-energization of electric assets in response to severe forecasted fire weather.
 - Red Flag warning DOES NOT automatically result in a PSPS; there are several other factors at play/to consider.



- During the Monitoring Phase of the PSPS Decision Process, NorthWestern Energy will begin reaching out to critical area stakeholders such as DES and other responder agencies to keep them informed of any planned actions (at least 72 hours in advance of a possible PSPS).
 - During the Watch Phase, NorthWestern Energy will begin their public outreach process (emails, texts, phone calls, posting alerts/messaging on their website, posting to social media pages, radio messaging, etc) to get the word out to their customers (48-72 hours in advance).
 - During the Warning Phase, outreach and information campaigns are still in use as the possibility of implementing a PSPS gets closer (less than 48 hours)
 - During the Alert Phase, NorthWestern Energy is still communicating with stakeholders and customers. At this point the PSPS has been scheduled (less than 24 hours out from the planned/scheduled PSPS taking effect).
 - THEN POWER IS SHUTOFF AS SCHEDULED.
 - Notifications will be sent out throughout the duration of the PSPS to keep stakeholders and customers informed of when power is anticipated to be restored.
 - THEN POWER IS RESTORED.
- Weather Monitoring Zones are areas with a higher risk of experiencing a PSPS (such as the distribution lines in and around Emerald Hills/Lockwood and Coburn Road) and thus are more closely monitored during high weather events, as opposed to other areas across/around Billings.
 - Public Safety Power Shutoffs can vary in length (several hours to several days)
 - Wait for inclement weather to pass that prompted the shutoff
 - Number and extent of needed safety patrols and inspections of affected areas
 - Repairs process to begin
 - All of the above are necessary and important factors that must be considered/implemented before power can be restored following a PSPS.

- More information about NorthWestern Energy’s Public Safety Power Shutoff Plan can be found at their website at: https://issuu.com/northwesternenergy/docs/2025_public_safety_power_shutoff_plan or by scanning the following QR Code with your phone or device:



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- More information about NorthWestern Energy’s Wildfire Mitigation Plan can be found at their website at: <https://northwesternenergy.com/safety/wildfire-safety/wildfire-mitigation-plan> or by scanning the following QR Code with your phone or device:



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- NorthWestern Energy is hosting a Wildfire Summit May 20-21, 2026.
 - Day 1 is a Public Safety Power Shutoff Tabletop Exercise based off of the December 17, 2025 wind event that impacted large parts of Montana.
 - Going through how they coordinate and communicate with stakeholders throughout that event.
 - Day 2 is a roundtable/panel discussion
 - SIGN-UP at: <https://nwewildfiresummit.eventbrite.com>

Subcommittee Schedule & Chair Contact:

- Right-to-Know (RTK)
 - VACANT
- Public Education & Information
 - CCC/CAER
 - Pam Sanderson
 - psanderson406@gmail.com
 - 4th Tuesday every month; 09:30-10:30 @ United Way or virtual
 - Crisis Communications
 - VACANT
- Hazardous Materials Facilities Liaison
 - VACANT
- Emergency Response and Resources
 - Exercise Design
 - Paul Totton (Email Chrissy Brese with questions)
 - volcoord@uwyellowstone.org
 - 4th Tuesday every month; 10:30-11:30 @ United Way or virtual
- Grants
 - Dianne Lehm
 - dianne@bigskyeda.org
 - Meets as needed. Contact Dianne for more details.
- Training
 - yclepc@gmail.com
 - Email all training opportunities to LEPC Gmail.

Subcommittee Reports:

- ***Right-to-Know (RTK) & Hazardous Materials Facilities Liaison***
 - Both committees still need a chair
- ***Public Education & Information***
 - Meets the 4th Tuesday of every month.
 - Nothing New to Report
- ***Emergency Response & Resources***
 - Exercise Design
 - May 14, 2026 – Airport Exercise is planned and final details are wrapping up.
 - Reach out to Shawn Gaalswyk (gaalswyks@billingsmt.gov) if you are interested in being involved with the exercise.
 - Per United Way – all needed volunteer slots have been filled.
 - Planning
 - Nothing New to Report

- **Grants**

- Current SHSP and EMPG grant funding have yet to be fully awarded/released. Projects on hold/unable to move forward until funding is released.
- Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) – administered through FEMA for government agencies across all levels of government.
 - Applications DUE July 23, 2026.
 - Typically requires engineering work to be submitted with the project applications.
 - No LEPC ranking letter requirement.
 - Jen Staton will forward out the email regarding BRIC Grant applications.

- **Training**

- **Emergency Management Institute (EMI) in Maryland is currently paused/closed. Unknown if this is a temporary or permanent decision.**
- As there is no chair, there are no meetings.
- All training opportunities should be emailed to LEPC Leadership, so they can forward them to the rest of the LEPC members.
- Training opportunities can be found at:
 - MTDES
 - DNRC/NWCG fire classes
- Betsy Ross is the state training coordinator at MTDES (betsy.ross@mt.gov)
 - New training opportunities are **BOLDED**.
- CISA does numerous FREE online trainings/webinars.
- Continue pursuing NIMS/ICS training. ICS 100, 200, 700, and 800 are free and can be completed 100% online.
 - [ICS 700.B – An Introduction to the National Incident Management System](#)
 - [ICS 100.C – Introduction to Incident Command System, ICS 100](#)
 - [ICS 200.C – Basic Incident Command System for Initial Response, ICS-200](#)
 - [ICS 800.D – National Response Framework, An Introduction](#)
- **IF DEPARTMENTS OR AGENCIES NEED ADDITIONAL CLASSES (higher level ICS) – CONTACT DES.**

End subcommittee reports

Continuing Discussion/Old Business:

- Yellowstone County HAZMAT Plan Update
 - DES has a meeting scheduled with HAZMAT stakeholders later in April to discuss what is currently in the plan and does the plan need to change to match current tactics/response procedures, or do the response procedures and tactics need to change to match the plan.
 - Minimal detail changes
 - Coordinate with 911 Center after HAZMAT stakeholder meeting to discuss and firm up what the results/changes discussed in the stakeholder meeting would/will

look like on the 911 dispatch side of things so they are dispatching the right people/resources to the right call type/incident level. (clarifying terminology across agencies).

- **Hazardous Release Report**
 - Standard releases/flaring events, vehicle crashes, and small spills.
 - 1 fertilizer truck tipped and spilled its load into a ditch (not an extremely hazardous substance, but crossed the threshold for reportable quantity)
 - No activations of the EOC or DES Personnel requested.

PUBLIC COMMENT: No public comments given during this time.

TOPICS OF NOTE/SITUATIONAL AWARENESS:

- Billings National Weather Service
 - On 4/9 at the Billings Public Library from 6:30pm-8:30pm NWS Storm Spotter Training
 - If you want dedicated/more in-depth training, reach out to the National Weather Service.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned @ 9:45 am. [1st: Bob Lough with YARES; 2nd: Paul Totton with Coventry Ren]

Next Meeting:

- **MAY 13, 2026 @ 09:00am**
 - **WE WILL BE IN THE 3RD FLOOR COUNTY COMMISSIONER'S BOARD ROOM AT THE JOHN V. OSTLUND BUILDING.**

ATTENDANCE RECORD – APRIL 8, 2026

Agency (Federally Funded?), First & Last Name

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Alternatives, Inc.
a. Rick Deady | 18. United Way
a. Chrissy Brese |
| 2. Big Sky EDA
a. Dianne Lehm | 19. YARES
a. Bob Lough
b. Paul Miller |
| 3. Billings Fire Department
a. Cameron McCamely | 20. Yellowstone County GIS
a. Alyssa Quiroz |
| 4. Billings Logan International Airport
a. Shawn Gaalswyk | 21. Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office
a. Shane Gibbs |
| 5. Billings School District 2
a. Joe Halligan | 22. Yellowstone County DES (yes)
a. Derek Yeager |
| 6. CHS Pipeline
a. Cody Yerger | |
| 7. CHS Refinery
a. Jacob Haan | |
| 8. Coventry Ren
a. Paul Totton | |
| 9. Montana DES (yes)
a. Jeff Gates | |
| 10. Montana Hospital Association
a. Jude Waerig | |
| 11. NorthWestern Energy
a. Max Rebholz | |
| 12. National Weather Service
a. Nick Vertz | |
| 13. Par Montana Pipeline
a. Tyler Wattles | |
| 14. Phillips 66 Refinery
a. Steve Blood | |
| 15. Rehabilitation Hospital of Montana
a. David Ude | |
| 16. RiverStone Health
a. Ray Ezell | |
| 17. St. Vincent's Hospital
a. Jennifer Staton | |

TOTAL ATTENDANCE: 23