

**Ranch Association, Inc.**  
PO Box 11  
Bigfork, MT 59911  
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**Your Board:** Mark Smolen, President  
Bill Thomas, Vice President  
Jerry Southwood, Sec/Treasurer  
Richalle Close  
David Davis  
Thaddeus Crouch

**Minutes from Ranch HOA Annual Meeting**  
**Sunday, June 11, 2023 at 2:00pm-Bigfork High School**

Attending: Robert/Tracie Bolain, Scott/Richalle Close, Roger/Diana Wilson, Vickie Franklin, Mark/Karla Smolen, Jerry/Jeanne Southwood, Jim/Diane Robertson, Annie Mulcahy, Patty Peck, Thaddeus Crouch, Shane/Sarah McDonough, Jim/Liz Hansen, Ryan/Bonnie Johnston

Meeting was called to order at 2:06pm – Agenda was handed out

President Mark Smolen asked all to introduce themselves.

Reviewed Minutes from last year's meeting and approved –Liz Hansen proposed approving and Robert Bolain seconded. All in attendance approved. Board had previously approved.

Mark met with the Bigfork Fire Department and the 60' turn around at the end of Pommel and Latigo met their approval. However, Bigfork Fire did request more trimming of right away areas along the HOA roads. If you see trees hanging into the roadway near your home, we would appreciate you trimming them.

Reviewed financial report from Chrysler & Gordon. Approximately 80% of our budget goes to road expenses. No questions. Only one HOA member is behind on their dues.

Road Repair Update: Lots of discussion about what to do this year. Nothing and save money and do a bigger section next year? We are falling farther behind on keeping up with resurfacing projects. It was decided to try and widen the area between the intersection of Ranch/Panorama up to the intersection of Ranch/Pommel. The snow and ICE from last year made this stretch very dangerous. Because of available funds this will likely be a 2 year project and Mark will keep the HOA posted. Some funds will be required for patching areas this year if the price is not egregious.

Snow Removal Contract: Charles/Snowbound will be our contractor for at least one more year. Cost will be going up for 2023/24 and we will know how much in July. This amount will be reflected in the 2024 budget. A lot of ¾-crush was used this year. Charles did a great job of sweeping the roads this spring to remove that heavy stone.

Dues Increase Proposal: the last dues increase was in 2017. Proposal for 2024 would raise dues to \$900 gross (was \$800) and \$850 net (was \$750). There are 53 dues paying lots in the HOA and this change would generate \$5,300 additional money to be applied to Road improvements. There was much discussion about the proposed increase. Robert Bolain made a motion to approve the dues increase and Ryan Johnston seconded. It was approved (13 yes, 1 no).

Mailbox Availability – a third cluster box was added and boxes are available for a one time cost of \$125. The first two boxes are full. Additional keys can be made at the hardware store.

Construction Updates-Ranch Road 555 new address just starting and Ranch Road 583 nearing completion.

Restatement of Bylaws-Brant Beaudry (Snyder Law) reviewed and made no changes but did clean up some of the duplications and combined the building regs from the covenants. Mark has posted the updated information on the HOA website. ranchhoa.org.

Much discussion about lack of consequences for not following covenants. The Architectural Review Committee approves house plans and lot clearing requests. Homeowners do not follow what was proposed. The HOA has no recourse other than to set an arbitrary fine/lein. Lot clear cutting has occurred in at least 3 situations. Tabled discussion.

Quarter Circle is going to be requesting rezoning of land along Highway 35. The plan is to develop at least 5 lots. All of these lots would use Ranch Road and would be included in the Ranch HOA for dues payments.

Jim Robertson requested that the large burn pile on Ranch Road be burned before the end of June. Robert Bolain offered to help and this will be done. Mark will hookup appropriate fire hoses and obtain a burn permit. Thank you to all that are able to help.

RANCH COUNTY WATER & SEWER DISTRICT updates:

Water levels seem to be okay but please think about your usage. Summer water has a huge impact on the overall monthly numbers. In the summer, the District supplies over 1 million gallons to just 39 homes.

The lawsuit against the District is still continuing.

Mark read aloud a letter from MACo, the insurance provider for the district. The District, along with 250 plus small water systems, will be losing their Property/Casualty insurance effective July 1, 2023. Gus Martel (and his team at Hub International), Jerry Southwood, and Lanee' Earhart and Mark Smolen have been working for several months to find an alternative. As of the HOA annual meeting no carrier has been found.

Water Board Election and HOA Board Election ballots were part of the handout at the start of the meeting. The ballot that was presented was elected.

Thank you to all that were able to attend this meeting. Adjournment was at 3:31pm

## **Follow-up to the meeting and additional items (since the annual meeting):**

Hi folks,

Below are a few additional items that have come up or gotten done since the meeting, but first I wanted to share a couple reminders.

We now have more kids than ever living up here. I'd like to remind everyone (again) to watch your speed. We also have more people living up here than ever before—overall, this adds to the traffic level and if we all take our time and drive courteously, it really helps everyone's overall attitude.

Many of you have given us your mobile phone contact info to be used for neighborhood announcements and emergency notifications. If you are not getting my text messages and want to, just email me or fill out the form on the Water District page of our website. If you don't have a mobile phone, we can use email or a phone call. If you would all email me your preferred contact number/method, I would be most appreciative. Please email these to [waterops@ranchhoa.org](mailto:waterops@ranchhoa.org). I have also used this system to update you on various items in the HOA.

Announcements for all HOA annual meetings are always put on our website at least 30 days in advance and one week in advance, signs are placed in the neighborhood. Please check the HOA website ([www.ranchhoa.org](http://www.ranchhoa.org)) for all information, guidelines, etc.

Thanks everyone for your support.

Mark Smolen

### **HOA Items:**

The website has been updated with the latest information (dues, bylaws, etc.)

All members have paid their dues at this time (thank you!).

We had a member ask to depart the board and that position was filled/elected with Bill Thomas. He (Bill) is taking part in both the HOA and Water Boards. Thank you Bill and welcome to the neighborhood. He and his wife Diane Wood will be moving in full time this summer as their home is nearing completion.

The burn pile on Ranch Rd was burned on June 29. Thank you to Robert Bolain and Jim Robertson for helping get this done safely.

Thank you to Robert Bolain for your service on both boards these past years. Your input and experience were most helpful and I know I can still ask you questions! ;-)

## **WATER District Items:**

Jerry Southwood asked to resign at the end of his term this year and Lanee' Earhart agreed to run for/and was elected to the position. She had time these past months to shadow Jerry and will be an excellent Secretary/Treasurer for the Water District Board. She already took part in the search and application process for our insurance.

June 20, 2023: The water district inspected all meter pits. Those with pressure reduction valves had a fitting replaced.

Bigfork Water had a line break down on Hwy 35 north of town. They are/were chlorinating the entire system June 19-30. You may or may not notice it.

All water tests are up to date. Five homes will be sampled for Lead and Copper tests (every three years), those that are part of the test have been contacted. These tests are being held until the chlorination of the system has passed for integrity and accuracy.

Update (6/29): Thanks to HUB International (Gus and his team), we obtained property and liability insurance for the water district. The insurance will be at roughly a 33% increase in cost to the district over previous years. You may see an increase in your base rate.

The Water District will hold its annual board meeting towards the end of July. The date will be posted on the Water District page under our website soon.

Montana DEQ (on behalf of the EPA) hit us with a Lead Line Survey. Thank you all that took Mark's calls or emails to get us the info we needed about your home. In fact, we were the very first water district to submit the entire survey back to DEQ in the entire state.

You were sent or given a link to our annual Water Quality Report earlier this year (link on the bill for those of you that get email bills); but you can always see it on our website's Water District Page any time—the best part is that we have some of the best water in the state. Mark Smolen also just completed 10 hours of continuing education for his Water Operator's license (required every two years).

If you haven't already, please consider using automatic bank draft for your water bill. It truly helps us and you never get behind or miss a payment. Just send us a voided check and the form which is on our website. The district will be cracking down on unpaid bills and turning off the water according to the rules sooner. Using auto-bank draft is the sure fire way to avoid penalties, and late/reconnection fees. Thank you to everyone that has signed up!

## **Ranch Water and Sewer District Board:**

Patty McNulty-Peck - President Term Expires June, 2024

Lanee' Earhart - Secretary/Treasurer Term Expires June, 2025

Bill Thomas - Board Member Term Expires June, 2025 (vacating)

Stacy Crouch Board Member Term Expires June, 2024

Gus Martel -Board Member Term Expires June, 2024

Mark Smolen - Operator (Montana Law prohibits the Operator from being on the board)