

## Letter-To-The Editor

Contact: Jim Atchison, SEMDC 748-2990

Date: July 6, 2023

Photo: One (1) as attached

### “Colstrip is Changing - - - Not Closing”

Dear Editor,

As the Executive Director of Southeastern Montana Development (SEMDC), I wanted to state that in my opinion, Colstrip is Changing - - - Not Closing! At least if Common Sense had a vote.

As an economic development professional serving a regional non-profit economic development group consisting of the four-counties of Custer, Powder River, Rosebud, and Treasure for the past 22 years, I have never been more excited and optimistic about the future of Colstrip and Rosebud County than I am today. And here's why:

Since the original Clean Power Plan was introduced years ago, it became apparent that in order for the Colstrip community to survive, it would need to urgently diversify its economy. SEMDC listened to the community, found the funding, and released the Colstrip Economic Diversification Strategy in 2017. This Strategy identified Six (6) major Goals and 17 Strategies that could diversify the Colstrip economy. Interesting that only about half of these Goals were energy related. In fact, the highest priority was to have additional Broadband Capacity in the Community. Other projects that were completed as the result of this Strategy, besides additional Broadband Capacity were **2) Market the region** as a safe and clean place to live and do business, **3) build a Business Innovation Center** as a one-stop shop to assist with workforce retraining, entrepreneurial development and have co-working and maker's spaces, **4) create a GIS Site Selection Service** and **5) complete an engineering plan for an Industrial Site** (Energy Park).

Another concept that came out of this Strategy was the phrase “Value-Added Energy Commercialization Opportunities.” Yes, just like Value-Added Ag – why couldn't Energy add value and create beneficial use opportunities? Thus, SEMDC entered into four contracts with private firms to conduct Feasibility and Technical Studies on **a) Hydrogen Development**, **b) Rare Earth Element Processing**, **c) Flue-Gas Capture** and **d) Graphene Research** – all at Colstrip and Rosebud County. Add additional Energy Projects such as **1) Construction of the state's largest Wind Farm** in the region, **2) Major Transmission Line project** starting at Colstrip and heading into the next grid to the east, **3) A federal Technical Study** on possible construction of Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMR's) at Colstrip and **4) with a significant Geothermal Option**, you can start to see the tremendous opportunities to Supplement our outstanding coal mining and power generation workforce and infrastructure capacity, already in-place.

But significant challenges and efforts continue to target the coal and energy industry at Colstrip. Even with attacks from numerous frivolous lawsuits to major disinformation campaigns, to the recent EPA MATS and Clean Power Plan 2.0 Proposals, including the BLM Coal Lease Review changes, I know that Common Sense will prevail and Montanan's will realize that we simply need more affordable electricity and transmission. Thus, due to the numerous positive opportunities developing, I certainly feel that Colstrip is Changing - - - but Not Closing!

*Jim Atchison is the Executive Director of Southeastern Montana Development (SEMDC), a regional non-profit economic development group established in 1997 to stimulate and encourage economic activity in the four (4) Counties of Custer, Powder River, Rosebud, and Treasure. Today, SEMDC works with the private, public, and non-profit sectors to help create and retain jobs in these four counties. Our track record has documented over 1,111 jobs created or retained and over \$76 million dollars in project assistance since 1997. Since 2005, we have been designated by the State of Montana as a Certified Regional Development Corporation (CRDC) and the federal Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District. For more information, contact SEMDC at 406-748-2990 or [www.semdc.org](http://www.semdc.org)*

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