

April 28, 2026

Jim Anderson, Montana Association of Realtors Eastern District Regional Ambassador

Hello fellow Realtors. April is coming to a close. Winter is releasing its icy grip. Hopefully most of you have gotten beneficial moisture over the last two weeks. With most of the state receiving more snow than we've had all winter. I'd like to say what a pleasure it is to represent the Montana Association of Realtors and to work with Realtors across Montana.

The eastern region of the Montana Association of Realtors is as diverse as it is large. Covering roughly 40% of Montana. Not only does it provide geographical diversity, it also offers increasing economic diversity? The region runs from the Canadian Border to the Wyoming Border and from east of Fort Benton to the North Dakota Border. Montana's Hi-Line economy is centered around agriculture and the Railroad. The Hi-Line is highly dependent on the Milk River Basin, which provides a large percentage of the economic and residential development activity. The Milk River basin is dependent upon the Saint Mary's Canal system. Which had a catastrophic failure in 2024. The system was unable to transport water from June of 2024 until early April of 2026. On a dry year, as much as 90% of the water in the Milk River basin is transferred through this system. Which provides Livestock, irrigation and domestic water for the residents of the Hi-line. Thanks to some hard work on behalf of Montana's Congressional Delegation, State Legislature, Governor and many others, the system which is over 100 years old, received necessary funding to help repair the catastrophic failure. This will be the first irrigation utilizing the system since 2024. The system is largely funded by the irrigators, providing water to irrigate approximately 120,000 acres.

The cities in the Hi-Line region of the Eastern Region: Include the largest city of Havre with Glasgow being the next largest city. Other towns include Malta, Chinook, Harlem, Wolf Point, Popular and Fairview. There are many smaller communities. The real estate brokers I spoke with along the Hi-Line indicated that the market is steady. They did see an increase in activity when rates dropped below 6%. There's very little new construction with the exception of the area around Fort Peck Lake. Which has experienced increasing residential construction. Driven by both in-state and out-of-state recreational buyers. Havre is experiencing economic activity driven by the multimillion-dollar expansion of the surgery and emergency care units of Northern Montana Hospital. Construction will soon begin on the 32-million-dollar Aurora complex on MSU Northern. MSU Northern is also undergoing a multimillion-dollar Residence Hall upgrade.

The far eastern edge of the district. Includes the cities of Sidney, Glendive, Miles City, Baker and Broadus. Sidney had experienced an economic blow approximately 2 years ago

when the sugar beet processing factory closed. Sidney and Fairview have seen some economic resurgence. Neighboring North Dakota is building a new refinery and a fertilizer processing plant. Along with some additional development of the Bakken oil field. The Hi-Line and the eastern side of the region; potentially are going to have a new oil pipeline. Running from Canada and eventually into Wyoming. It is anticipated that the pipeline would create many construction jobs. As well as some ongoing operational positions.

Lewistown, the largest community in the center of the region, is experiencing increasing economic activity. From new businesses and additional residential construction activity. Located close to Fort Peck Lake, the Snowy Mountains and the Charles Russell National Wildlife Monument make Lewistown a great place to live if you want to play outdoors.

Billings the economic center of the region continues to see strong economic expansion with a newer Amazon and Coca-Cola facilities and a proposed 5000-acre AI Data center. The strong economy has kept unemployment in Yellowstone County at 1.7%, amongst the lowest in the country. Brokers I spoke with indicated a continued strong residential market.

Red Lodge has experienced some price depreciation on the higher valued homes. The concerns resulting from the new property tax structure and an open winter have contributed to the price pressure. Columbus is stable with some anticipation of the potential for the Stillwater mine to increase activity and jobs. This is driven by the import Tariffs on the rare earth minerals produce from the Stillwater Mine.

My next report will cover more of the communities that make the Eastern Region just as economic complex as vast. I will also include information from my activities as the NAR Federal Political Coordinator for Congressman Downing.

Get out and enjoy the vast openness of Eastern Montana; it has much to offer. June is Rangeland Month in Montana. Take time and look around; there is much to see. Rangeland makes up over 70 percent of the landscape.

Jim