

2023 TOURISM MASTER PLAN



CARBON COUNTY TOURISM MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Leslie Jefferson – Discover Carbon County Wyoming Yvonne Johnson – Carbon County Economic Development Corporation Megan McComas – Discover Carbon County Wyoming Pam Thayer – Rawlins DDA/Main Street & Rawlins Economic Development

CITY/COUNTY/STATE GOVERNMENT

Byron Barkhurst – Carbon County Commissioner Kathy Beck – Saratoga Town Council Sarah Brugger – Carbon County Planning and Zoning Alex Foster – Town of Baggs Mira Miller – City of Rawlins Community Relations Jennifer Moore – Carbon County Higher Education Lonnie Porter – WY State Parks and Cultural Resources / Seminoe State Park & Ft. Steele Historic Site

Kristy Rowan – Carbon County Planning and Zoning Heather Tupper – WY Business Council Missy Turney – WY Department of Workforce Services Andy Williams – Bureau of Land Management

BUSINESS / COMMUNITY LEADERS

Mike Armstrong – Carbon County Comet Sharon Biamon – Medicine Bow Museum Danny Burau – The Malt / County 6 Clothing John Evans – Riviera Motor Lodge Alex Gruenhagen – Brush Creek Ranch Tina Hill – Wyoming Frontier Prison Rosalyn Herring – 620 Vacation Home / Good Things Cindy Loose – VIP Marketing Schelby Merrill – Pine Lodge / The DiVide Amanda Moore – Windswept Goods Dave Rader – EconoLodge Casey Shinkle – Best Western Cottontree Inn Julie Webb – Carbon County Fairgrounds

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2023 TOURISM MASTER PLAN

I. WHY A CARBON COUNTY TOURISM MASTER PLAN?

This Tourism Master Plan's purpose is to help guide and develop the Carbon County travel industry for the benefit of residents and visitors. This 10-year plan is a roadmap to an attractive future with specific roles for various community organizations.

While this is a tourism master plan, the included strategies are intricately linked to resident quality of life and community livability. These efforts all work together – the amenities that attract visitors are the same that provide quality of life for residents. By making the community a better place to visit, Carbon County is making itself a better place to live and work.

Goals of the Plan include the following:

- Agreement on major goals and strategies,
- Coordination of efforts by business, civic, and government organizations,
- Reduced duplications of effort,
- Accountability for progress on the plan, and
- Inspiration for additional community improvements.

The Carbon County Tourism Master Plan covers all eleven communities and the unincorporated areas of Carbon County, WY.

II. THE MASTER PLANNING PROCESS

Discover Carbon County engaged Rudloff Solutions to coordinate and conduct this planning process.

Discover Carbon County formed a 27-person Steering Committee of economic development, business, hospitality, and government leaders to oversee the effort. The Committee provided input through inperson meetings, interviews, and online feedback.

Phase 1 - Research

Rudloff Solutions and the Steering Committee performed Phase 1 research steps in May-June 2023.

Literature Review: Reviewed 26 reports, plans, and research studies related to the travel industry, the local economy, and the development efforts of Carbon County, various communities, local economic development agencies, state agencies, and others (Appendix A). From this analysis, Rudloff Solutions identified 4 major travel opportunities that had been discussed by several organizations in previous plans and research. The Steering Committee reviewed and fine-tuned the opportunities.

Resident Survey: Surveyed Carbon County residents (91 respondents) in an online questionnaire about the Carbon County travel industry, area attributes, and the strategic opportunities.

Visitor Survey: Surveyed previous Carbon County visitors (215 respondents) in an online questionnaire about desired activities for a return trip to the area and about area amenities.

Stakeholder Interviews: Interviewed 20 travel industry, business, and community leaders to gather input on the 4 strategic opportunities in greater detail (Appendix B).

Rudloff Solutions presented the Phase 1 Research results to the Steering Committee in a June 2023 workshop in Rawlins.



Phase 2 - Master Plan Development

After a thorough review of the Phase 1 Research results and the Steering Committee's feedback, Rudloff Solutions developed draft strategies for the Master Plan. The Steering Committee supplied additional feedback through an online survey. After revising the plan based upon this input, Rudloff Solutions presented a second draft plan to the Steering Committee in Rawlins in August 2023. Discussion at this August meeting led to the final version of the plan.

III. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

VISION for the Carbon County Travel Industry: Carbon County offers an authentic Wyoming experience filled with scenic beauty, outdoor recreation options, and unique communities.

CARBON COUNTY'S STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

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The Visitor Experience	Outdoor Recreation	Hospitality/ Economic Development Framework	Collaborations and Advocacy

IMPLEMENTATION DEFINITIONS

- Timelines: Short term 1-2 years. Medium term 3-5 years. Long term 5-10 years.
- **CCEDC:** Carbon County Economic Development Corporation
- **SWORC:** Southeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative
- **Communities:** The 11 communities in Carbon County: Baggs, Dixon, Elk Mountain, Encampment, Hanna, Medicine Bow, Rawlins, Riverside, Saratoga, Savery, and Sinclair.
- **Econ Dev Partners:** Discover Carbon County, CCEDC, Rawlins DDA/Main Street, and Chambers of Commerce. If one of the Econ Dev Partners is named specifically, it is expected to play a larger role than the others.



STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY The Visitor Experience



Carbon County is a beautiful and diverse county with a rich history and an abundance of natural attractions. However, as a large rural county with a small population, Carbon County lacks amenities and businesses that are often desired by visitors and residents.

a. Improve the county's major thoroughfares.	appearance within communities and along
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG LEAD: COUNTY, COMMUNITIES SUPPORT: ECON DEV PARTNERS, CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS	 Implement "clean-up" efforts in the county and its communities. Options include: Community Clean-Up days Take Pride in our Community campaigns Friendly cleanup competitions between communities or organizations Fun partnerships between local governments, civic organizations, churches, schools, etc. to improve communities. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
	Maintain existing transportation infrastructure (roads, bridges, sidewalks, etc.) and consider beautification enhancements on future road and bridge projects. Ensure future projects have adequate maintenance budgets. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
	Engage local artists and install more public art, such as murals and sculptures, as feasible. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
	Support enforcement of already-established neglect / nuisance ordinances. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)



b. Implement a cohesive wayfinding sign system throughout the county, highlighting attractions and major destinations. Include community gateway entrances and consistent branding elements to present a unified, attractive welcome message to the county and its communities.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LEAD: DISCOVER	Design a wayfinding sign system for the county and its communities. Consider how to integrate the work of SWORC into the plan. (SHORT TERM)
CARBON COUNTY	Pursue funding and partnership agreements with communities for the project. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)
COMMUNITIES, ECON DEV PARTNERS	Create and install the wayfinding signs, providing positive first impressions and directions for visitors. (MEDIUM TERM)

c. Support the development of new or improved attractions, amenities, and businesses to fill community and visitor needs (as they are financially feasible). Ensure that ongoing maintenance is considered for improvements.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG LEAD: ECON DEV PARTNERS	Encourage public-private sector collaborations to develop or improve attractions and amenities. Examples include the new Saratoga trails study and Brush Creek Ranch's support of existing and new products (County Fair, skijoring, fundraising, opening ranch amenities to the public, etc.). (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
SUPPORT: COUNTY, COMMUNITIES	Support efforts to interpret and present the county's rich heritage at local museums and other historic venues. Support the proposed Pathways National Heritage Area which will highlight the area's historic assets. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
	Investigate the possibility of new incentives or public financing methods to assist in the development of quality-of-life amenities. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)
	Encourage businesses to include more visitor supplies in their product selection. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)

d. Support downtown development efforts in the County's communities.

a. Support downtown development enorts in the County's communities.		
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM	LEAD: COMMUNITIES, RAWLINS DDA/MAIN STREET	SUPPORT: ECON DEV PARTNERS, COUNTY

e. Create a Carbon County wind energy attraction to educate and entertain both visitors and residents about the wind energy industry. The attraction would create positive publicity for the industry and build stronger partnerships between the hospitality industry, economic development partners, and wind energy companies.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG

LEAD: CCEDC, DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY, WIND ENERGY COMPANIES

SUPPORT: COUNTY

Explore options to create one or more wind energy industry attractions. Build on tours currently provided by energy companies to existing wind industry infrastructure. Options:

- Van/bus tours (operated by Discover Carbon County) to an active wind turbine facility.
 - Static displays of wind energy equipment,
 - Kinetic wind sculptures, or

• Other displays and activities. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)

Develop an implementation plan with the support of wind energy companies. **(SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)**

Complete the new wind energy attraction. (MEDIUM LONG TERMS)

f. Investigate acquiring a van / bus to assist with transportation for various travel industry needs.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM

LEAD: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY **SUPPORT:** ECON DEV PARTNERS, COUNTY





STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY Outdoor Recreation



Carbon County's outstanding outdoor recreation options include scenic drives, abundant hunting and fishing, major trails, and renowned guest ranches. Visitors rave about these recreation options as reasons to visit the county, while residents tout the options as

important quality of life amenities they enjoy. However, some recreation and outdoor options are undeveloped without adequate physical and informational resources. Improving these existing outdoor recreation amenities will allow the county to increase its tourism economic impact, while protecting the vital resource.

a. Work with and support the Southeast Wyoming Outdoor Recreation Collaborative (SWORC) to unite stakeholders, federal and state agencies, and hospitality members on the development of sustainable outdoor recreation. Focus on developing existing recreation amenities more fully.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG LEAD: SWORC, WY STATE PARKS	 Promote these Carbon County opportunities to SWORC: Scenic byways and backways Winter recreation options and infrastructure Signage, for both roads and trails Land and river access for recreation (SHORT MEDIUM TERM)
SUPPORT: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY, OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTNERS	Publicize the findings and recommendations of SWORC to stakeholders, governments, and elected leaders throughout the county. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)
	Working with partners and local governments, implement key recommendations from SWORC. (MEDIUM LONG TERMS)

b. Promote responsible outdoor recreation opportunities.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUMclear LEAD: DISCOVERrecResRes	Promote awareness of correct trail and outdoor recreation etiquette, clear boundaries between public and private lands, and conscientious recreational habits. Consider using the WY Office of Tourism's "WY Responsibly" messaging or something similar. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)
	Market the area's outdoor recreation options wisely, paying attention to seasonality and potential overcrowding. Work to spread visitation around both geographically and seasonally. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)

c. Develop and promote outdoor recreation businesses (rentals/retailers/ outfitters) to enable visitors and residents to easily access and enjoy the county's hunting, fishing, boating, and other recreational experiences.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LEAD: DISCOVER	Promote existing outdoor recreation suppliers to visitors and residents using the publicity tools of economic development partners. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)
CARBON COUNTY, CHAMBERS, CCEDC	Recruit new outdoor recreation suppliers, from both inside and outside the county. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)
SUPPORT: SWORC, RECREATION STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	Consider establishing an outdoor recreation grant program to assist existing or new providers. This could be in partnership with the WY Outdoor Recreation Office, Discover Carbon County, SWORC, Chambers, or others. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)

d. Enhance the visitor amenities at Seminoe State Park and the Miracle Mile area.			
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG	Document the growth in visitation and increased demand for additional services, such as rentals, in the Seminoe State Park / Miracle Mile area. (SHORT TERM)		
LEAD: WY PARKS,	Consider innovative partnerships to aggregate funds and resources		
DISCOVER CARBON	to provide new amenities, such as kayak rentals and firewood.		
COUNTY	Partnerships between public organizations (WY State Parks, Discover		
SUPPORT: SWORC,	Carbon County), private organizations (Seminoe Boat Club), and user		
RECREATION	groups will likely be required to overcome seasonality, staffing, and		
STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	capital challenges for these efforts. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)		

e. Promote and enhance Carbon County's extensive byways, backways, and trail network.		
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG	Aggressively promote the county's byways, backways, and trails network which includes the Snowy Range Scenic Byway, Battle Highway, Great Divide Mountain Bike Route, the TransAmerica Trail, the Wyoming Backcountry Discovery Routes, and the Continental Divide Trail. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)	
LEAD: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY		
SUPPORT: SWORC, COUNTY, ECON DEV PARTNERS, CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL COALITION	Encourage improvements to the network (as feasible) in partnership with SWORC and local, state, and federal partners. Ensure that ongoing maintenance is considered for all improvements. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)	



f. Promote and enhance Carbon County's Continental Divide Trail (CDT) experience, especially as it passes through Rawlins.

Develop a plan for Continental Divide Trail enhancements in Rawlins **TERM:** SHORT MEDIUM (and throughout the county as feasible). Make Rawlins a unique trail LONG stop for shopping, dining, lodging, and other experiences. Consider options such as marking the trail in a unique manner, adding photo-**LEAD:** RAWLINS DDA/ ready "wow" features, and supplying needed services. If possible, tie in MAIN STREET, DISCOVER the heritage of the transcontinental railroad and the Lincoln Highway, CARBON COUNTY taking advantage of interest in these routes as well. (SHORT TERM) SUPPORT: Determine funding sources and partners for the Rawlins CDT CONTINENTAL DIVIDE enhancement. Implement the project. (MEDIUM TERM) TRAIL COALITION. CARBON COUNTY Consider improvements at other Continental Divide Trail gateway CDT AMBASSADORS communities (Riverside and Encampment) and throughout the county. AND GATEWAY Implement as feasible. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS) COMMUNITIES, ECON DEV PARTNERS, COUNTY



STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY Hospitality / Economic Development Framework



Carbon County's hospitality industry and overall economic development are being hindered by significant workforce and housing challenges. Marketing for visitors is counterproductive if motels and restaurants do not have staff to provide service, thus diminishing the

customer experience. Improving these economic framework issues is vital to the county's future economic growth and development.

 a. Support efforts to improve the local hospitality workforce, in terms of both quality and quantity. 		
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG	Investigate a partnership with a local higher education institution to provide hospitality training for area workers. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)	
LEAD: WY DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE SERVICES, DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY	Develop positive relationships with the WY Department of Workforce Services and other workforce agencies so they promote employment opportunities in the hospitality industry. Be the voice of the hospitality industry in workforce programs. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)	
SUPPORT: EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, ECON DEV PARTNERS	Assist businesses by hosting/promoting hospitality job fairs and job boards. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)	
	Participate in and encourage lodging / dining partners to engage with the new WY Department of Workforce Next Gen Partnership tasked with developing private sector-led initiatives to improve the hospitality workforce situation. (SHORT MEDIUM TERMS)	

b. Represent the hospitality industry in policy efforts seeking to solve the county's housing challenges.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM	LEAD: DISCOVER	SUPPORT: ECON DEV
LONG	CARBON COUNTY	PARTNERS

c. Encourage local governments to explore the effects short-term rental properties have on their communities. Consider policies and ordinances that may improve the situation for the benefit of residents, workers, and visitors.

Examples include:

- * Limiting out-of-state ownership of short-term rentals,
- * Capping the percentage of housing stock taken up by short-term rentals, and
- * Licensing short-term rentals.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM

LEAD: COMMUNITIES, COUNTY **SUPPORT:** ECON DEV PARTNERS

d. Consider regulation and code adjustments at the state, county, and local levels to remove barriers hindering the county's economic development on issues like housing, workforce, wi-fi, etc. Work to improve the county's economic and livability framework.				
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG LEAD: COMMUNITIES, COUNTY SUPPORT: ECON DEV PARTNERS	Carefully review the findings of the Wyoming Business Council's Pathways to Prosperity studies, particularly the recent Housing Report. Consider recommendations from other organizations as they become available as well. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			
	Implement the housing recommendations that make sense for individual communities or countywide in terms of zoning, land-use, regulations, etc. Find the most viable solutions for the situations found in Carbon County and its communities. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			
	Monitor future Pathways to Prosperity Action Steps that will be forthcoming from the Wyoming Business Council on housing and other issues (workforce, wi-fi connectivity, etc.) to improve local economic development. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			

e. Back efforts to develop new lodging and camping facilities to help reduce visitor demand for short-term rentals that reduce the availability of housing stock for residents.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM

LEAD: CCEDC

SUPPORT: ECON DEV PARTNERS, COMMUNITIES, COUNTY

Photo courtesy of Brush Creek Ranch



STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY Partnerships and Advocacy



A tourism vision and plan requires human infrastructure to ensure that the vision and strategies are realized. This is extra critical in Carbon County where, simply put, there are too few people and resources in a big county to implement county-wide strategies if

partners don't work together. The public needs to be supportive of these efforts as well, so public education about the travel industry and the needed policy steps are vital.

a. Use this Tourism Master Plan as a roadmap for improving the hospitality industry and resident quality of life.				
TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG	Present the Tourism Master Plan to the Carbon County Council of Governments, local governments, civic organizations, and other partners. (SHORT TERM)			
LEAD: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY	Hold semi-annual meetings of the Steering Committee to monitor progress and update the plan based on changing conditions. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			
SUPPORT: ECON DEV PARTNERS, COMMUNITIES, COUNTY	Consider organizing informal get-togethers of hospitality industry and community leaders to create networks of leaders pursuing positive progress for the industry. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			
	Integrate the plan's strategies into the budgets and work plans of local governments, economic development, and civic groups where appropriate. The plan should help guide public infrastructure decisions, private investments, and public-private partnerships. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			
	Provide regular updates of the plan's progress to elected officials, the travel industry, and the public. (SHORT MEDIUM LONG TERMS)			



b. Develop strong messaging about the positive impact of the travel industry on county residents (visitor spending, hospitality jobs, taxes paid, restaurants and businesses supported). Present this message through the local media, social media, annual reports, and civic club presentations.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG

LEAD: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY **SUPPORT:** ECON DEV PARTNERS, COMMUNITIES, COUNTY

c. Advertise tourism within Carbon County to educate residents of the area's amenities and to help create local pride, turning residents into area ambassadors. Encourage residents to frequent local retailers and to promote them, building the retail base.

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG

LEAD: DISCOVER CARBON COUNTY **SUPPORT:** ECON DEV PARTNERS, COMMUNITIES, COUNTY

d. Speak with one voice advocating for Carbon County and its projects before the WY Legislature, the WY Business Council, the Wyoming Office of Tourism, and other state agencies on grants, promotions, and lobbying efforts. (Short Medium Long terms)

TERM: SHORT MEDIUM LONG

LEAD: COUNTY, COMMUNITIES **SUPPORT:** ECON DEV PARTNERS

IV. RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE VISITOR AND RESIDENT SURVEYS

WORD OR PHRASE THAT REPRESENTS CARBON COUNTY

- VISITORS -----

- RESIDENTS -----

peaceful air great country utdoors lots beauty openscenic friendly beautiful funbow freedom west scenery rustic outdoor people adventure snowynatural

people history rundown small outdoors Spaces fishing beautiful county dirty home big town shop beauty open community cold peaceful actively wide space

TOP ACTIVITIES DESIRED BY VISITORS ON A RETURN TRIP TO CARBON COUNTY



QUALITY RATING OF CARBON COUNTY AMENITIES BY VISITORS AND RESIDENTS

(1 Low Quality, 5 High Quality)



RESIDENTS - CARBON COUNTY HAS

The right amt of tourism	31%	Too much tourism	4%
Not enough tourism	59%	Unsure	6%

How many times do you participate in outdoor recreation in Carbon County each year?



- VISITORS -----

Do you bring outdoor recreation equipment with you on your trip to Carbon County?



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V. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A CARBON COUNTY DOCUMENTS REVIEWED IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

Discover Carbon County

Discover Carbon County Strategic Plan 2020-25 Carbon County DestinationNEXT Study, 2019 Tourism Assessment of Rawlins, 2012 Lodging Study (Randall Travel Marketing), 2012 Carbon County Tourism Conversion Study, 2012 Discover Carbon County Visitor Surveys, 2020-22 Carbon County Recreation and Trail Map

Economic Development Organizations

Rawlins Downtown Plan, 2010 Rawlins Chamber of Commerce website Saratoga Chamber of Commerce website Carbon County Economic Development Corporation website City of Rawlins Economic Development Plan, 2012

City/County

City of Rawlins Comprehensive Master Plan 2012-2030 Carbon County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, 2012 Master Plan for the Town of Riverside, 2010 Town of Saratoga Comprehensive Master Plan, 2016 Carbon County Natural Resource Management Plan, 2021 Annual Report Carbon County Planning & Zoning Commission, 2022 Rawlins Municipal Airport Master Plan, 2021 Saratoga Airport Master Plan, 2014 Dixon Airport Master Plan, 2022

Attractions/Amenities

Continental Divide Trail Coalition website

State / Federal

Wyoming Office of Tourism Strategic Clarity Overview FY 23-24 Wyoming Office of Tourism Economic Impact of Travel to Wyoming, 2022 State of Wyoming Economic Development Strategic Plan, 2021 (WY Business Council) Report of Wyoming Governor's Task Force on Outdoor Recreation 2017

APPENDIX B STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Kathy Beck - Saratoga Town Council Sarah Brugger – Carbon County Planning and Zoning Danny Burau – The Malt / County 6 Clothing John Evans – Riviera Motor Lodge Alex Foster – Town of Baggs Alex Gruenhagen – Brush Creek Ranch Rosalyn Herring - 620 Vacation Home / Good Things Brynn Hirschman – WY State Parks and Cultural Resources / Outdoor Recreation Collaboratives Leslie Jefferson – Discover Carbon County Wyoming Yvonne Johnson – Carbon County Economic Development Corporation Cindy Loose - VIP Marketing Schelby Merrill – Pine Lodge / The DiVide Lonnie Porter – WY State Parks and Cultural Resources / Seminoe State Park & Ft. Steele Historic Site Dave Rader - EconoLodge Casey Shinkle - Best Western Cottontree Inn Dianne Shober - WY Office of Tourism Leroy Stephenson – Town of Riverside Mayor Pam Thayer – Rawlins DDA/Main Street & Rawlins Economic Development Heather Tupper - WY Business Council Mike Williams – Brush Creek Ranch

APPENDIX C PROJECT TEAM

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Sector States