

Big Lakes

COUNTY

Big Lakes County, Alberta, Canada
For the year ended December 31, 2021



Annual Report

2021

www.biglakescounty.ca



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Welcome to Big Lakes County's 2021 Annual Report. Learn how Council and administration are working towards our vision of building a sustainable municipality for all our stakeholders—our residents, businesses, investors, and visitors. We hope that you will find this Annual Report useful and informative.

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Welcome to Big Lakes County

More than 12,500 people live within Big Lakes County's municipal boundaries in independent communities—hamlets, towns, First Nations reserves, Métis Settlements, and acreages and farms—relying on County services to work, shop and play.

Big Lakes County delivers vital services every day: from fire services and bylaw enforcement that help keep residents safe, to road clearing and transit that keep people moving, to parks and libraries that enrich lives.

An elected Council, including eight ward councillors and a reeve, sets policies, approves budgets and bylaws, and provides direction for a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) who leads the administration. The CAO is Council's direct employee.

The County's administrative staff is led by the CAO and serves the public by implementing Council's vision and providing County services. Administration is made up of four departments, which work together to manage interrelated activities and lines of business.

Our Mission

Big Lakes County's mission is to enhance our community by encouraging responsible development that supports our agricultural and resource-based industries.

This means investing in core services like infrastructure, communities, and other municipal services. Through Council policy and resolutions, we will promote responsible development, environmental security, and positive intermunicipal relations with our private, public and governmental partners.

Our Vision

Building a Sustainable Municipality

Through Council's leadership, we will strive to build and diversify Big Lakes County's economy and strengthen Big Lakes County's role as a leader of rural municipalities. We will strive for sustainability and set the stage for continued innovation, education, diversification, and good government, and by maintaining the rural landscape in Big Lakes County, we will be protecting agricultural resources and significant natural environments for future generations.

Council

Message from the Reeve

Dear Ratepayers,

On behalf of Council, I am pleased to present the 2021 Annual Report, which highlights growth, opportunity, and progress in our County and what we are working towards for 2022. Each of our projects is part of a larger story – how we are striving to accomplish Council's vision of building a sustainable municipality.

Big Lakes County faced another year of uncertainty as the pandemic continued to disrupt lives and livelihoods, placing pressures on our relationships, financials, and health. Early on in 2021, the arrival of a vaccine provided some relief – but new waves brought new challenges.

Throughout 2021, Council had the difficult job of dealing with the financial realities of a stretched County budget due to increased pandemic costs and lower revenues. To ensure we were not compromising on current service levels, Council made the difficult decision to increase the mill-rate by 5% in 2021. Responsible fiscal management remains a top priority for Council to ensure that we can continue to provide a high level of municipal services for generations to come. As with 2020, uncollectable linear and non-residential taxes also posed challenges to our operating budget, but fortunately additional legislation helped to address some of these issues.

2021 was also an election year that saw the County welcome seven new councillors, with the highest voter turnout in several years Councillors have spent the last few months connecting policies, motions, and votes with what they heard door-knocking in their communities. We look forward to Council continuing to provide value for the tax dollar and moving us closer to our mission of enhancing our community.

We know the effects from the pandemic will be with us for years to come, but we also know that when faced with the most collectively challenging of circumstances, our Council and administration have shown that they can be adaptable, innovative, and caring. This will not only help to see us through, but also allow us to continue to take meaningful steps toward building a sustainable municipality.

As always, your feedback on how we can make the County better is greatly appreciated and will only make us stronger and more resilient moving forward.



ROBERT NYGAARD
Reeve



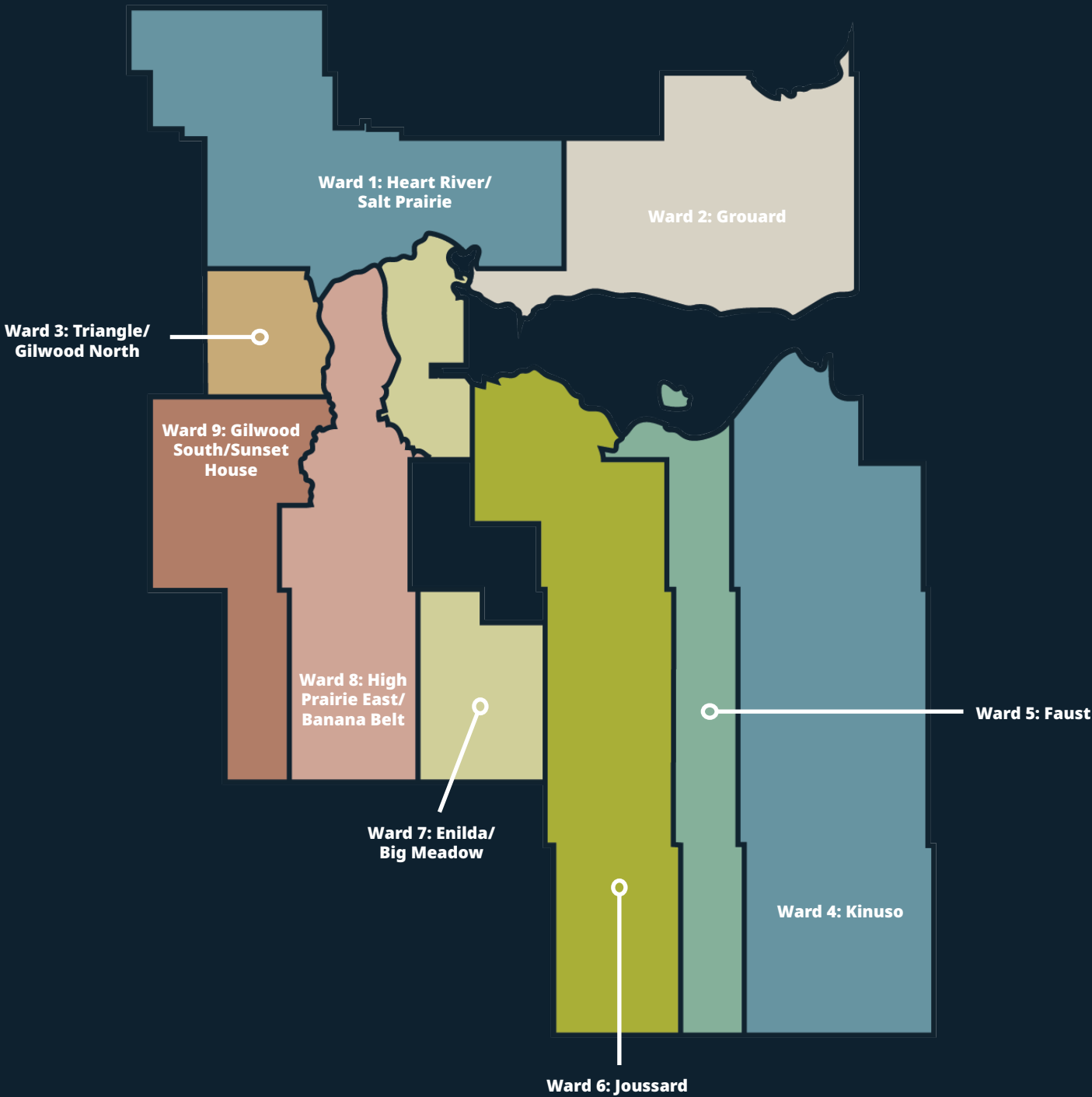
Council

Your Elected Officials

More than 18,000 people live within Big Lakes County's municipal boundaries in independent communities – hamlets, towns, First Nations reserves, Métis Settlements, and acreages and farms. Big Lakes is made up of 1,213,056 hectares of land that is divided into 9 wards. Every four years, during the municipal election a councillor is elected in each ward.



Back: Councillor Garrett Zahacy — Ward 1, Councillor Jeff Chalifoux — Ward 2, Councillor Tyler Airth — Ward 8, Councillor Richard Mifflin — Ward 6, Councillor Lane Monteith — Ward 7.
Front: Councillor Ann Stewart — Ward 9, Deputy Reeve Jim Zabolotniuk — Ward 3, Reeve Robert Nygaard — Ward 5, Councillor Roberta Hunt — Ward 4.



Council

Boards & Committees

While each body differs in its area of responsibility and requirements for appointment, they all have one common requirement: they depend on citizens willing to serve their municipality.

Big Lakes County's boards and committees play a key role in the operations of the County. Unlike Council, members of these bodies are appointed, not elected. Some of the boards and committees require members to meet specific qualifications, such as residency in the County, or have a specific area of expertise.

INTERNAL BOARDS & COMMITTEES

- Agricultural Service Board
- Assessment Review Board
- Municipal Emergency Advisory Committee
- Economic Development Committee
- Finance Committee
- High Prairie Airport Committee
- Inter-Governmental Relations Committee
- Municipal Planning Commission
- Peavine Métis Settlement Agreement Committee
- Intermunicipal Subdivision and Development Appeal Board
- Weed & Pest Control Appeal Board

EXTERNAL BOARDS & COMMITTEES

- Alberta CARE
- Barrhead Social Housing
- Big Lakes County Library Board
- Children's Resource Council
- Community Futures Lesser Slave Lake Region
- CHWC Community Partnership Committee
- FCSS Advisory Committee
- Golden Triangle Consortia
- Grouard/Peace River Trail Committee
- Heart River Housing
- High Prairie Aboriginal Interagency
- High Prairie Chamber of Commerce
- High Prairie Municipal Library Board
- High Prairie & District Regional Solid Waste Management Authority
- High Prairie Seed Cleaning Co-op
- Little Smoky Recreation
- Lesser Slave Lake Forest Resource Advisory

Committee

- Lesser Slave Watershed Council
- Northern Alberta Elected Leaders
- Northern Lakes College Community Education Committee
- Peace Airshed Zone Association
- Peace Library System
- Peace Region Economic Development Alliance
- Smoky Applied Research & Demonstration Association
- Swan Hills Special Waste Liaison Committee
- Tolko Forest Resource Advisory Committee
- Northwest Species at Risk
- Water North Coalition

TOWN OF HIGH PRAIRIE COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

- Fire Budget Review Committee
- High Prairie & District Recreation Board
- Library Budget Review Committee
- Recreation Budget Review Committee
- Recreation Masterplan Committee

INTERMUNICIPAL COMMITTEES

- Town of High Prairie
- Town of Swan Hills
- Municipal District of Greenview
- Municipal District of Smoky River No. 130.
- Municipal District of Lesser Slave River
- Northern Sunrise County
- Alberta North Central Alliance
- Big Lakes Regional Emergency Partnership Committee

Administration

Message from the CAO

Residents of Big Lakes County,

I am proud to present Big Lakes County's 2021 Annual Report. My hope is that this report provides transparency on how your tax dollars contribute towards the many services we provide for the community.

2021 has presented the County and community with many financial and operational challenges with Covid-19 but has also offered a lot to be excited about. Throughout 2021, Big Lakes County has prioritized business continuity, fiscal responsibility and continuing to enhance our partnerships with our municipal and Indigenous neighbours by building on our Intermunicipal Collaborative Framework agreements and working together to build a new regional alliance consisting of five municipalities and five first nations. I commend all elected officials for their visionary leadership.

Stronger commodity prices and additional legislation to address unpaid taxes has enabled the County to increase its collection rate of our non-residential tax base. With provincial and federal grant funding trending down in recent years, collecting on our existing tax base has provided stability to the services we offer and future investments into our community.

Thank you to the elected officials, staff, volunteers, and community supporters who continue to make Big Lakes County such a wonderful place to live. I look forward to an even more successful 2022.

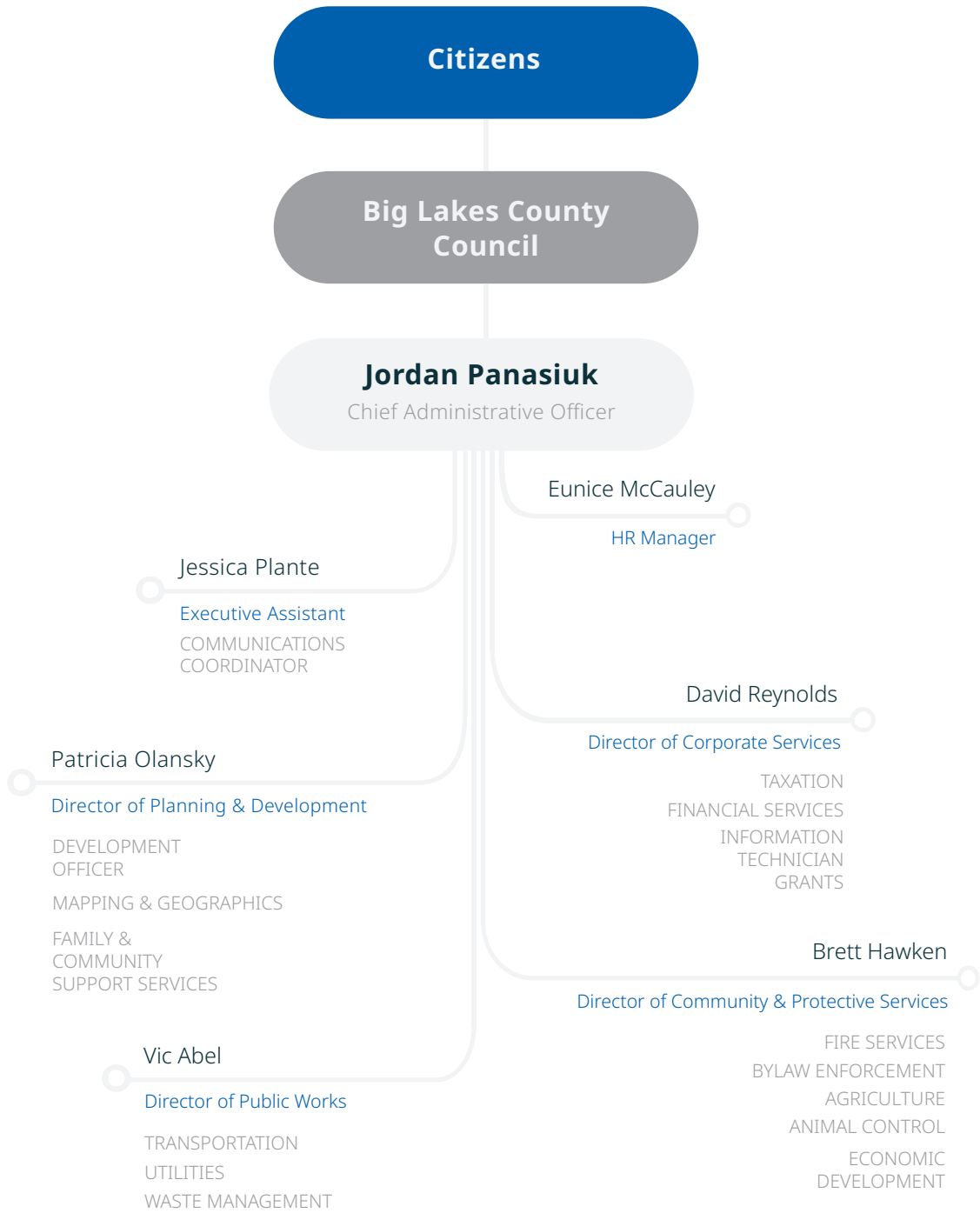


JORDAN PANASIUK
Chief Administrative Officer



Administration

Organizational Chart



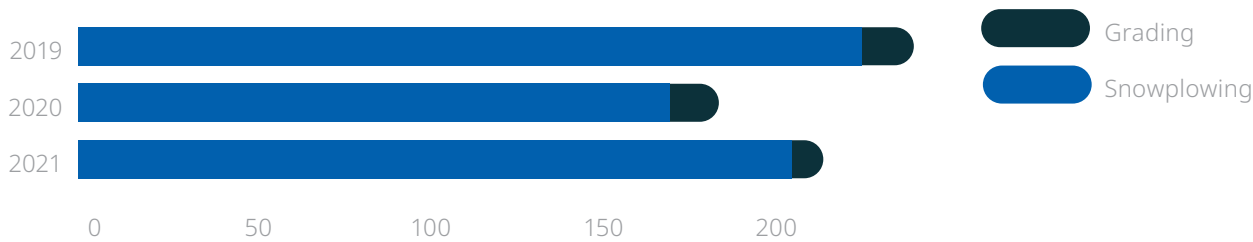
Public Works

Transportation

Big Lakes County provides a variety of operational services year around. The following information is intended to provide a glimpse into the daily operations of our municipal services.

Private Driveway Snowplowing & Grading

Private driveway snowplowing and private driveway grading is provided to residents who have entered into an agreement for these services. In 2021, grading and snowplowing services were provided on a cost recovery basis for a minimum charge of \$74.00 plus GST. The total number of driveways snowplowed and graded can be seen below:



Grader Beat Hours

In 2021 the County restructured the grader beat areas, moving from eight grader beats to seven, which includes two contract graders.

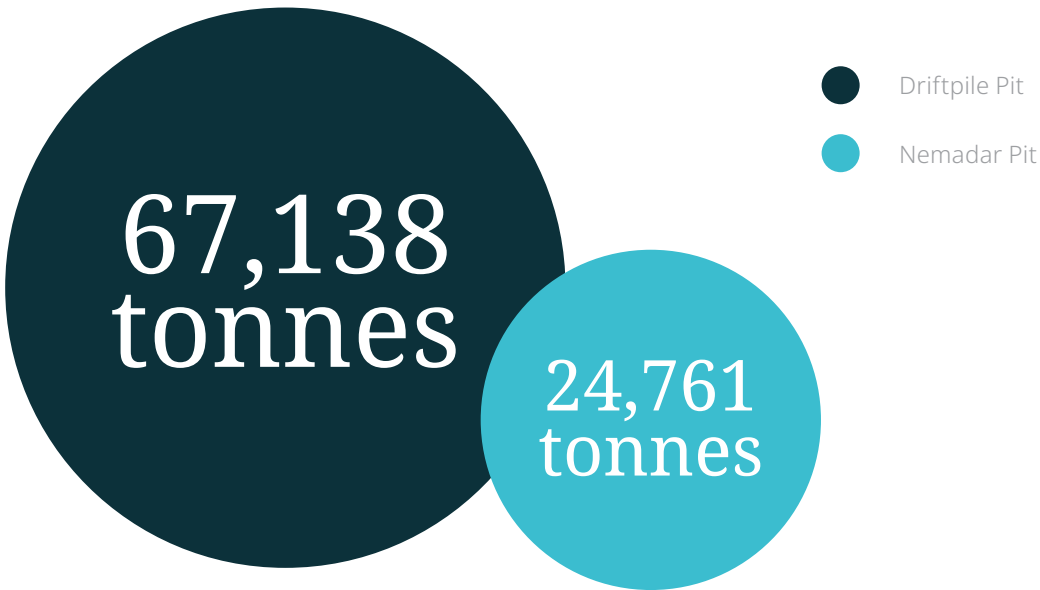
Banana Belt/Snipe Lake	1888
Kenzie/Gilwood	1370
HP West/Gilwood (Jan/Feb only)	102
Winagami/Salt Prairie	1357
Big Meadow/Grouard	2135
HP Southeast/Enilda	1379
Joussard/Faust	1113
Kinuso	1712

The variances in unit hours are due to weather, number of dust-controlled areas and kilometres of roadway in each area.



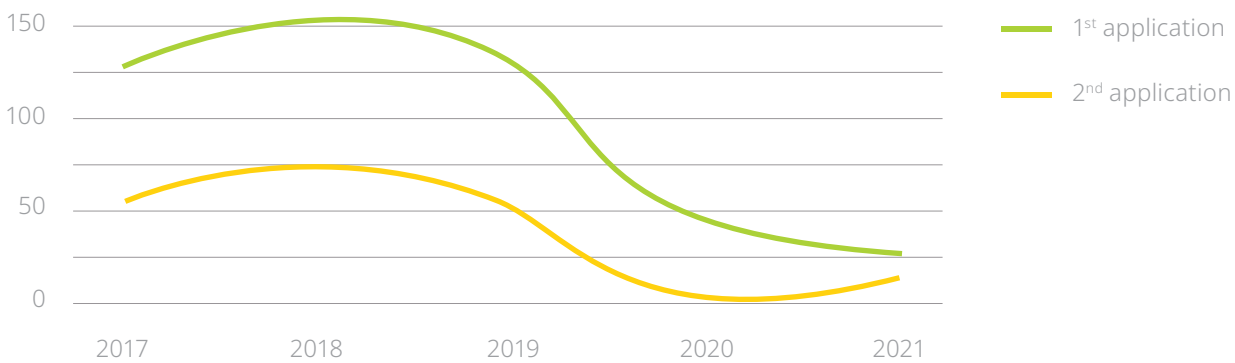
Quantity of Gravel Placed on County Roads

The County is continually working on securing aggregate resources for future road maintenance. The following shows the total tonnage of gravel placed on County roads in 2021 and the gravel pit that the gravel was hauled from.



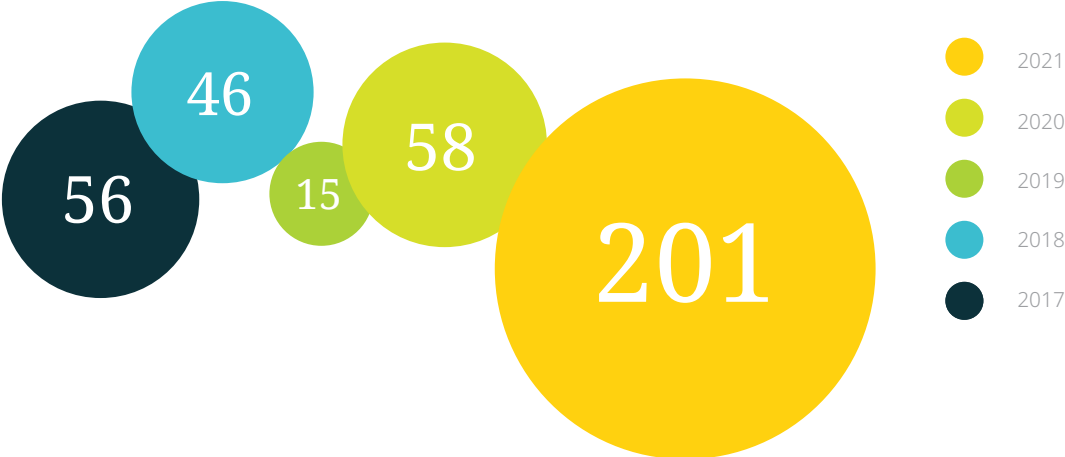
Dust Control Applications

The County applies calcium chloride dust control at its own cost along gravel roads within the hamlets as per the Dust Control Policy. Rural residents within the County may also apply to have 150 metres of dust control applied in front of their residence. This service was provided twice last year at a subsidized cost of \$494.00 for the first application and \$370.50 for the second application. The graph below indicates the number of applications received from rural residents in the last five years. In 2021, the County applied 4.16 km of dust control for rural residents.



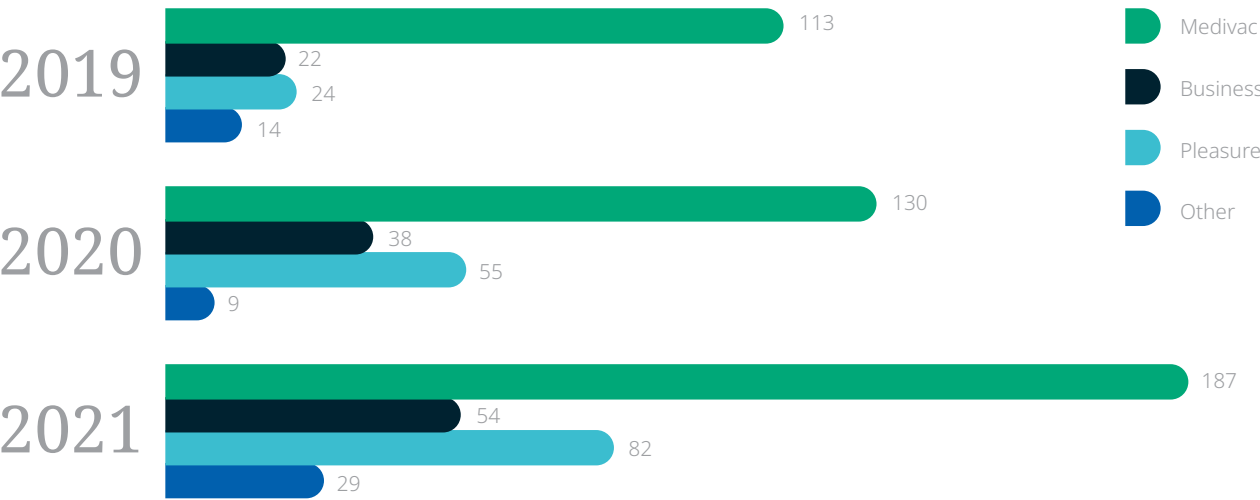
Number of Flights Recorded at the Swan Hills Aerodrome

The Swan Hills Aerodrome, located approximately 4 km south of the Town of Swan Hills, is under the management and control of Big Lakes County. This Aerodrome is a Self-Register Aerodrome as this is an unmanned facility. Pilots are asked to record their flight details on the Airport Register. This aerodrome is equipped with an all-weather runway measuring 4496 ft long by 100 ft wide.



Number and Type of Flights Recorded at the High Prairie Aerodrome

In 2017, Big Lakes County took over ownership of the High Prairie Aerodrome located 2km south of the Town of High Prairie. This Aerodrome is also a Self-Register Aerodrome. In 2019, major upgrades were completed at the airport including a runway extension, runway overlay, lighting upgrades and an overlay of the access road. The High Prairie aerodrome is equipped with an all-weather runway measuring 3933 ft long by 75 ft wide.



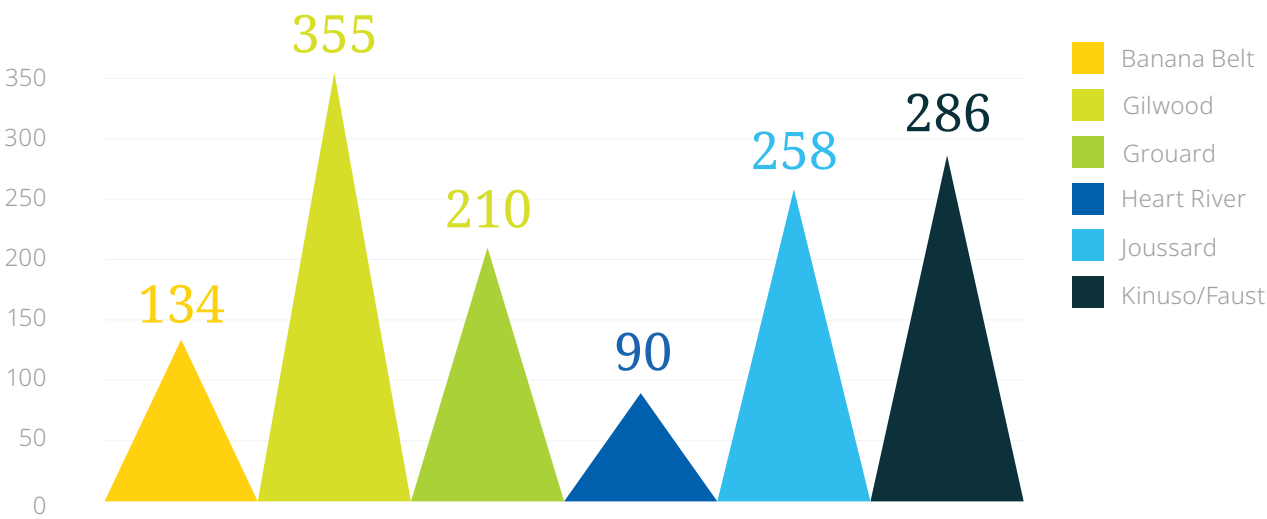


Public Works

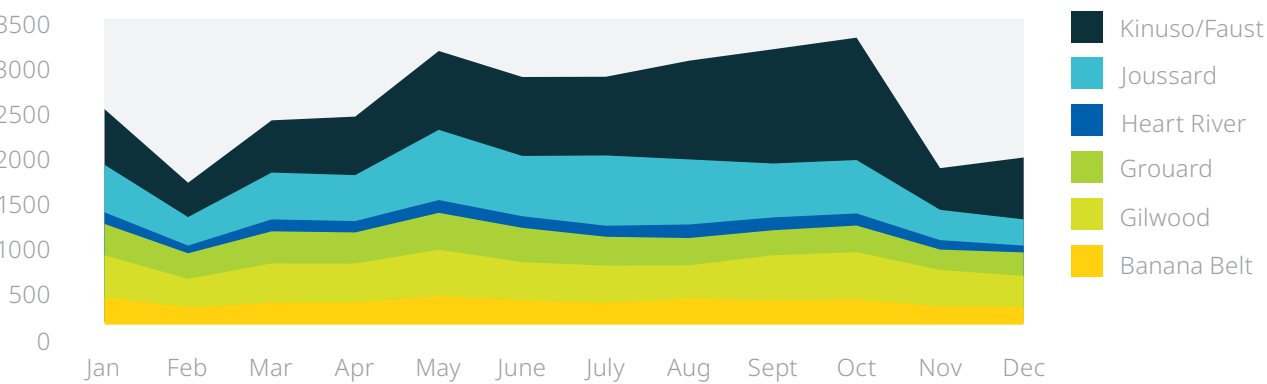
Waste Management

Public Works administers Waste Management, which includes a Regional Landfill and seven Waste Transfer Stations with a full-time Landfill Manager to accept your waste and recycling.

Total Waste Tonnage Received From Each Transfer Station



Number of Users Recorded at County Transfer Stations




Public Works

Utilities

The Utility department administers water and wastewater services to five hamlets, nine rural areas, one water co-op and two First Nations. The department has nine full time staff consisting of the Director of Public Works, Utilities Manager, Utilities Foremen/Operator, Utilities Coordinator, and five full time Utilities Operators.

 **110** fire hydrants flushed

 **55** meter installations/replacements

 **5** water mainline repairs

 **+500** water samples

 **6** rural installations

 **14 km** of sewer line repairs



2021 Infrastructure Projects

The remaining 2021 infrastructure projects are still in various stages of completion:

- Jossard Water Treatment Plant & Reservoir Expansion (Complete)
- Triangle area water extension (design stage)
- Prairie Echo waterline expansion (design stage)
- Grouard Water (conceptual design stage)

Big Lakes County Solar Farm

Big Lakes County's Solar Project was commissioned on October 20, 2020 and began producing power in December. This opportunity is a large part of building sustainability and adopting a clean energy future for Big Lakes County.










The County was able to access over 41% of the money required through the Alberta Municipal Solar Program, offered through the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre (MCCAC) to pay for this project. Other grant funding was provided through the Federal Gas Tax fund.

The main objective of the solar farm is to reduce the cost of the direct energy used by the County. The solar farm produces the electricity used by the shop and office, and on sunny days the surplus electricity is sold back into the grid. Over time the credits that Big Lakes County will receive for selling electricity back to the grid will pay for the cost of the panels themselves and more.

Between January 1, 2021, and December 31, 2021, the Big Lakes County solar farm has produced a micro-generation credit of \$21,390.89. This credit has paid for power consumption during this period and a credit of \$15,429.63 remains on the County's account.

The average home in Alberta uses 600 kWh of electricity. In 2021, Big Lakes County's Solar Farm produced:

 **65,688 kWh**

  
  
   or the equivalent of powering 9 houses for an entire year!

Carbon Offset

 **373.41** metric tons of CO₂

or the equivalent of

32.24 hectares



Community & Protective Services

Agricultural Services

The Big Lakes County Agriculture department offers a variety of services and programs that benefit our rural residents. The Agricultural Fieldman has a legislated responsibility for weed and pest control, water, and soil conservation, to assist the province under the Animal Health Act, and to promote agricultural economic development.

Big Lakes County Agricultural Services aims to improve and support the economic viability and vibrancy of the agricultural industry within our County. This is done through the implementation of Agricultural Service Board programs and priorities, participation in provincial agricultural surveys, the support and delivery of sustainable agriculture education, collaboration through extension organizations, and meeting municipal responsibilities through the Weed Control Act, Agricultural Pest Act, and Soil Conservation Act.

The County conducts agricultural pest surveys annually for fusarium, clubroot, virulent blackleg, and grasshopper. In 2021, 281 canola fields were checked for clubroot with two positive findings. While this is good news, please scout your fields for clubroot as we cannot control it if we are unaware of it. Also, no incidence of Fusarium was found, however, we encourage producers to be diligent in monitoring for this disease. Test your seed before planting and monitor your fields for signs of fusarium.

In 2021, Big Lakes County continued in the Alberta Land Use Services (ALUS) Program. ALUS helps farmers and ranchers produce ecosystem services on their land. These include cleaner air, cleaner water, flood mitigation, carbon sequestration, species at risk, habitat and support for native bees and pollinators. Two projects were continued from 2020, for a total of

310 acres being enrolled into the program and these projects were completed in 2021. New projects for 2022-23 are being reviewed in the year 2022.

We would like to thank our residents for dealing with their weed infestations - weeds are everyone's concern, and it takes a team effort to get them under control. In 2021, there were 321 inspections and 207 new infestations; ensuring that we need to remain vigilant in our control efforts.

The Agricultural Service Board is focused on providing quality services and assistance to our ratepayers. The following programs were administered in 2021: Vet recruitment, supporting both PCBFA and SARDA, vegetative control, spray exemption program, pest management, agricultural equipment rental program, weed and pest inspection, identification services, shelterbelt program, ALUS, and the wolf hunting incentive and Twine Bags are made available for producers at the transfer stations.



Community & Protective Services

Fire Services

Big Lakes County Fire Services has 70 dedicated volunteers in our five fire districts, Enilda, Grouard, Jossard, Faust, and Kinuso, who have proved their level of service and devotion to Fire Services through resiliency and perseverance.

2021 brought many challenges, like everyone else, with COVID which impacted training by reducing or sometimes eliminating training for months at a time. COVID, however, did not impact service levels and the Fire Service continued business as normal, serving our community and responding when called.

The Big Lakes County Fire Service is comprised of seven districts providing emergency services to our residents, those who visit and pass through. The Enilda District provides structure and wildland fire protection while assisting other Districts as needed. The Grouard District provides structure, wildland, and motor vehicle response. Jossard provides structure and motor vehicle response. Faust District provides structure, fan boat and water rescue. Kinuso provides structure and rescue services. Our partners from the Town of High Prairie (District 6) and the Town of Swan Hills (District 7) provide structure, wildland, and motor collision responses within the County. The Big Lakes County Fire Service works with our community partners by providing first response to Peavine Metis Settlement, Kapawe'no First Nation, and East Prairie Metis Settlement. The County is working diligently with our other First Nation and Metis Settlement neighbours to get fire service agreements in place.

The Fire Service review which took place in 2020-21 continues to be a work in progress as we move through the recommended changes. A new Fire Service bylaw, levels of service policy and green light bylaw were created. The Fire Service standard

operating guidelines (SOG) are in the process of being updated as they have not been revised since 2006. These SOG's establish health and safety, operations, prevention, administration, training, equipment maintenance guidance to its members and administration.

Over the next 6 years most of the County's front line fire trucks are nearing the end of their service life of 20 + years. The National Fire Protection Association and the Underwriters Insurance Survey of Canada set standards as to how long a fire truck can be in service. The age of fire trucks does impact insurance accessibility and the rate you pay as homeowner.

The Fire Service has a seasonal staff member who manages the fire permit program and has issued 760 permits within the County's protection area. The focus of the program is to provide education and ensure landowners are burning safely. The Fire Service, alongside our partner Alberta Wildfire share information, assist each other on calls and train together. This cooperation brings an efficient, cost-effective response when called upon.

The Fire Service received 191 calls last year, but for most calls you will have more than one District responding to the call. For example, if the Fire Service is responding to a structure fire the initial call out would be two fire engines and two tender engines. The reason we will send four trucks is because the average structure fire takes a minimum of ten people.

Community & Protective Services

Economic Development

Big Lakes County is situated just a few hours north of Alberta's major cities and has a beautiful landscape of lakes, forests, and rolling countryside. The Economic Development Authority (EDA) entered its sixth year in 2021, focusing on agriculture, forestry, energy, and tourism.

In 2021, the County started a free Business License program that is tied to a Business Refurbishment grant which was executed at the beginning of 2022. The business license allows businesses, if they so choose, to have an authorized business license from the County which can help for various insurance, grant applications, etc. The refurbishment grant was introduced to help improve the aesthetics of County businesses, both physically and online.

With many businesses still being affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2021 and eventually when COVID is behind us, the County will continue to be a liaison for businesses in our region and provide them with information on provincial and federal grant opportunities and resources.

The EDA initiatives that were completed by the County in 2021:

- Continued using social media platforms to release information on the Class 1 Driver Grants, business programs, provincial resources such as Bizconnect, Community Futures, Alberta Small Business Resources, Business Link, Agriculture Job Connector, provincial grant opportunities, and the County Grant Writing Assistance Program.
- County Firefighter Driver Training Program will help our local firefighters drive fire truck apparatus and gain another trade skill.
- Planning & Development oversees the business license program and continues to excellently deliver that service in a timely manner.
- Tax Instalment Payment Plan (TIPP) to allow

residents and businesses to pay property taxes monthly instead of one payment in June.

- Residents can now pay by e-transfer for certain payments to allow for easier, quicker, and alternative methods of payment.
- Our new Grants Officer updated our community group/society list to ensure that all grant information is relayed to the right individuals within the groups. If you would like to add or update your community group/society to this contact list, please reach out to the Grants Officer at 780-523-5955.

Community & Protective Services

Bylaw Enforcement

The Bylaw Enforcement Officer enforces County bylaws that have been implemented by the Big Lakes County Council. Where ratepayer's activities or property conditions don't meet acceptable County standards, the Bylaw Enforcement Officer provides education, warnings, inspections, and applies penalties if necessary.

Bylaw Enforcement works with ratepayers in all areas of the County to ensure that basic community standards are maintained to a reasonable level. The Bylaw Enforcement Officer is responsible for enforcing bylaws to deal with common complaints such as:

1. Unsightly properties in hamlets and county residential subdivisions, which can include uncut long grass and/or weeds, garbage storage, the presence of wrecked and/or dismantled vehicles, including vehicles that are inoperable and/or not registered and insured on the ratepayer's property. Reference to: UNSIGHTLY PROPERTY BYLAW NO. 01-2020, SECTION 3.
2. Recreational vehicle (RV) parking in the hamlets: All RVs require a development permit within the hamlets, whether being used for storage or accommodation. Depending on the size of your lot,

you may be allowed up to two RVs or up to four RVs on your property, all of which require a development permit. Specifics regarding how many RVs you can have on your property can be found in section 6.34.2. and 6.34.7 of the Land Use Bylaw. Reference to: LAND USE BYLAW SECTION 6.34

3. Development permits are required for all new development except for cases as outlined in section 3.2 of the Land Use Bylaw. This includes new accessory buildings/structures such as a shed (larger than 107.6 square feet in size), sea can or deck. Farm buildings, such as barns and granaries, and most agricultural operations are exempt from requiring a development permit. Reference to: LAND USE BYLAW SECTION 3.1,3.2, AND 6.

For information regarding all our bylaws, please visit biglakescounty.ca/bylaws

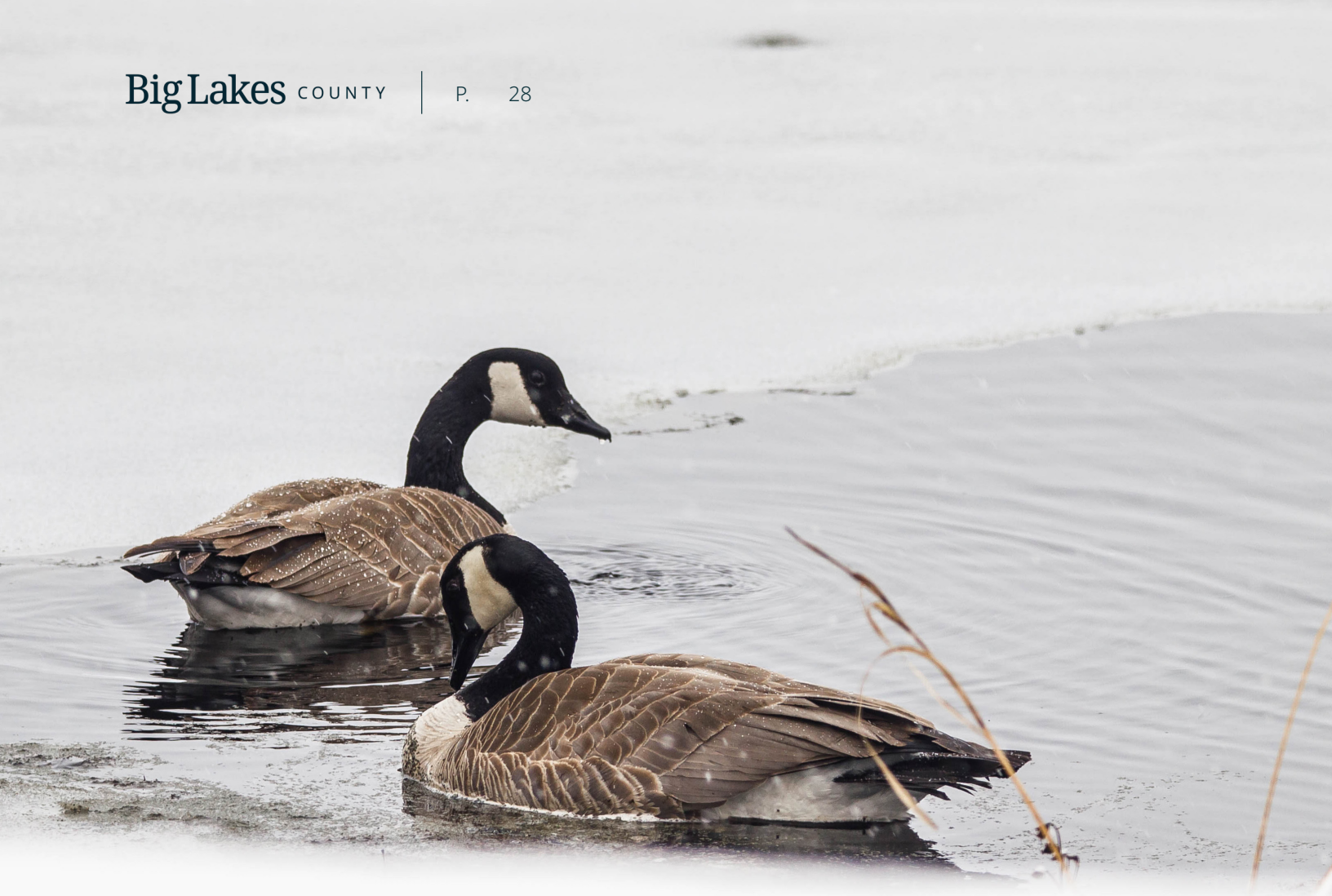
Big Lakes County Bike Helmet Safety Program

As a reward for children wearing the proper bike helmet or protective gear while riding their bikes, skateboards, or scooters in the hamlets, they may be given a coupon to be redeemed at a select ice cream shop. If children do not own helmets, the Bylaw Enforcement Officer has a select number of helmets to distribute to children who need protective gear.

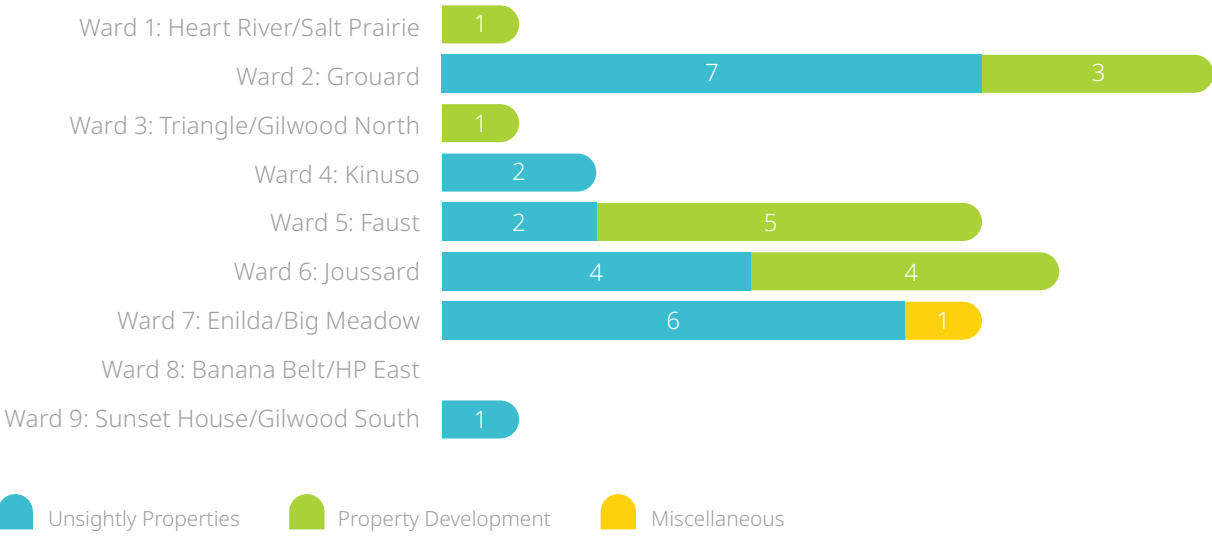
Since 2019 this program has been in effect and deemed a success! Multiple children enjoyed a cold ice cream. We are happy to maintain cooperation with all

the participating stores and we will continue to send thank you letters to all our partners in this program.

With 2021's success, Bylaw Enforcement will continue this program into the summer of 2022 to attract more awareness for safety for youth and adults. Reward cards will be provided to the Utility Workers, Peace Officers, and the Animal Control Officer who are in the hamlets as another set of eyes to help shed a positive light on the County's awareness for safety.



Bylaw Enforcement File Types Generated Per Ward



Community & Protective Services

Animal Care & Control

Big Lakes County's Animal Care & Control program serves the community by enforcing the Animal Control Bylaw and the Livestock Bylaw. This typically means responding to complaints about animals at-large, being neglected, abandoned, nuisance animals, and sometimes dangerous animals. Animal Care & Control also assists residents in identifying the best animal husbandry practices and assists residents with problems they may be experiencing with their pets.

Dog & Owner Reunification Efforts

Animal Care & Control has been focusing on increasing the number of dogs who are reunited with their owners. We have achieved higher percentages than ever in 2021 as 52% of dogs who came through our doors were claimed by their owners.

This is accomplished by posting the dogs on our website and Facebook page, and our officers reach out to community members and try to have the dogs identified. There is still room for improvement however, so we are working on methods to increase these numbers even more in the coming years!

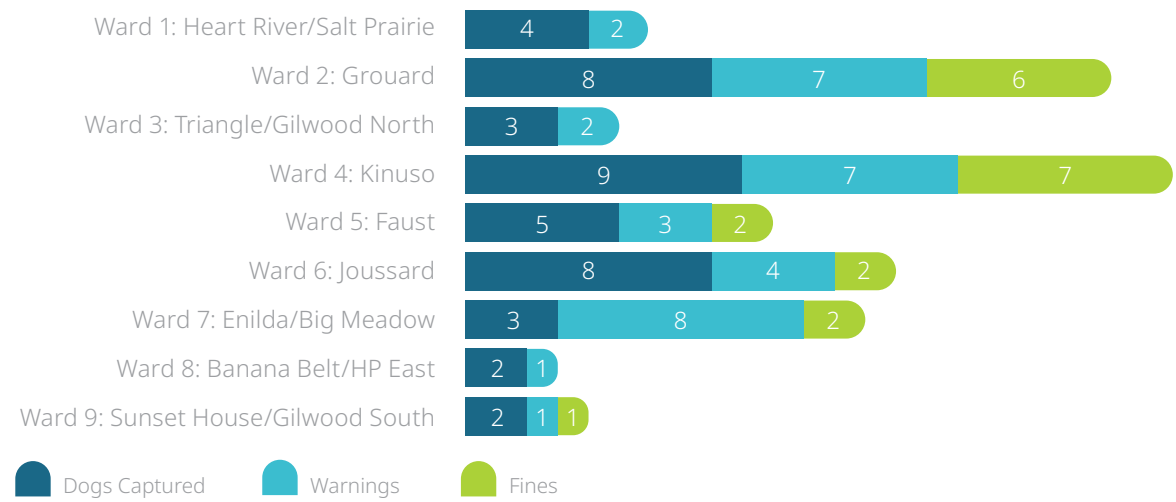
In the Woods Animal Rescue

Big Lakes County has worked very closely with "ITWARS" over the past years with all un-claimed or surrendered animals being taken in by this wonderful not-for-profit organization.

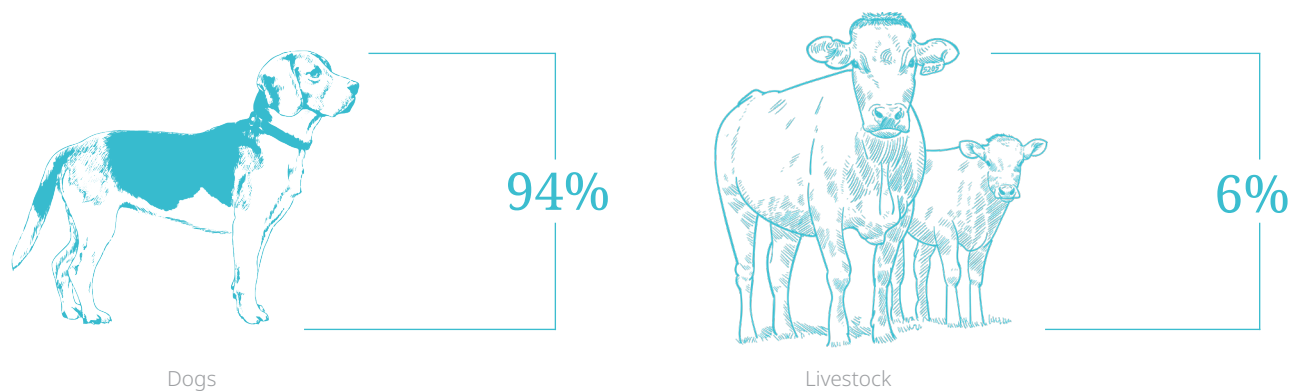
The animals are then spayed or neutered, microchipped, receive vaccinations, get dewormed and are adopted to approved homes. What a wonderful resource to have near our community!



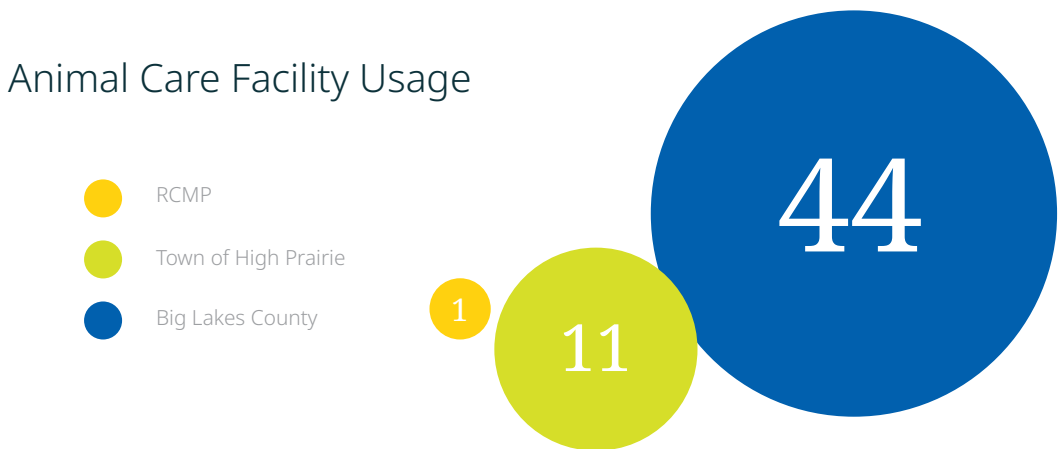
Animal Care & Control File Types Generated Per Ward



Types of Case Files Handled By Our Animal Control Officer



Animal Care Facility Usage



Planning & Development

Planning & Development

Planning & Development is a diverse department here at Big Lakes County. It combines many different sectors and professions to improve our communities and to help build a better future. Together we strive to make a difference in our communities today and tomorrow.

2021 Activity Highlights

In 2021, the Planning a& Development Department consisted of the following staff - Director of Planning & Development, Development Officer, one Administrative Support, the Family & Community Support Services Program (FCSS) and the GIS (Geographic Information System) Administrator. FCSS is made up of the Family & Community Support Services Manager, 3 FCSS Outreach Workers, an Administrative Support position, a full time Home Support Worker, a contract Youth Program worker, and a contract bus driver.

The Planning & Development component administers the County's statutory planning documents - the Municipal Development Plan, Land Use Bylaw, and Area Structure Plans by providing recommendations to the subdivision & development authority (Municipal Planning Commission) and Council on applications such as development permits, subdivision approvals, and Land Use Bylaw amendments.

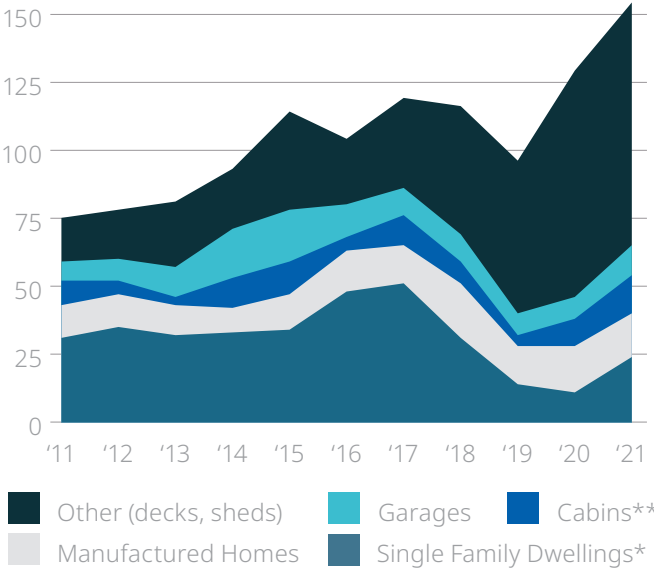
When you are seeking subdivision or development approval, our department must ensure that you have a suitable building site, adequate water and mechanisms to dispose of waste. The *Municipal Government Act* (MGA) provides direction on many aspects of planning and development and all our policies, bylaws and procedures must comply with the legislation within the MGA.

Our second year in a global pandemic, saw an improved situation in department operations from 2020. We had adapted to working from home while

still providing services to our residents. Our residents continued to apply for many subdivisions and development permits as shown in the graphs below.

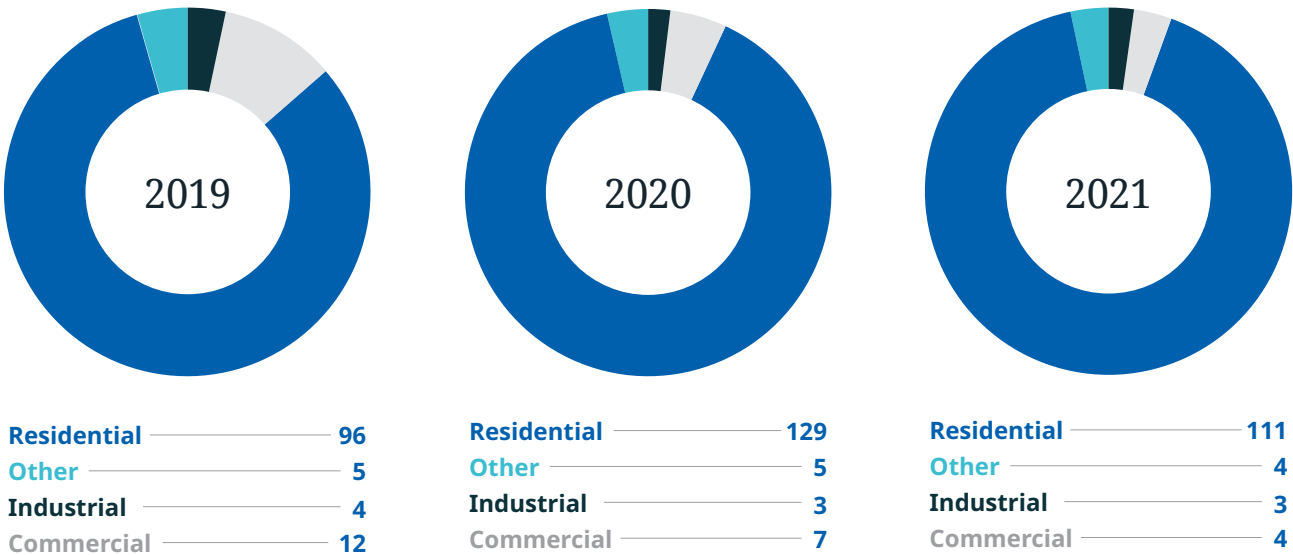
Residential development permit numbers were higher in 2021 than in previous years. As in 2020, the majority of these were residential development permits for smaller accessory building projects. Residential development, as a whole, saw an increase in development value of \$2 million over 2020.

Residential Development by Number of Permit Applications



*Includes additions
**Cabin is a dwelling (not single detached used as a temporary residence)

Development Permit Applications



Unfortunately, the increase in Alberta's oil production in 2021 was not reflected in new Industrial development permits for the year. Commercial development saw a big jump in 2021 over previous years due to the re-construction of a service station and restaurant/convenience store development destroyed by fire the previous year.

Development Applications by Construction Value

	2019	2020	2021
Industrial	40,100,000	10,000	160,000
Commercial	1,368,000	260,000	2,210,000
Residential	7,298,275	7,352,741	9,107,600
Other*	741,500	42,000	8,000
TOTAL	49,507,775	7,664,741	11,485,600

In 2021 the County changed safety codes services providers from Superior Safety Codes to The Inspections Group. The service provider is responsible to review and process building, electrical, gas, plumbing and private sewage disposal permit applications, issue these safety codes permits, and inspect the work completed within the County. This agency also provides code advice and consultations, conducts investigations in conjunction with various local and provincial regulatory agencies and investigates safety codes related complaints.

Subdivision applications were lower in 2021 over the previous year. There were 17 subdivision applications for rural acreages in 2021 and 6 applications for urban (hamlet) lots. By year end, 3 new urban lots and 4 rural lots were registered at the Alberta Land Titles Office.

Subdivisions by Number of Applications

	2019	2020	2021
Urban (Hamlet)	5	0	6
Rural	16	20	8
Rural Multi-Lot	0	2	1
Bareland Condominium	0	0	2
TOTAL	21	22	17

Completed Subdivisions by Number of Lots

	2019	2020	2021
Urban (Hamlet)	0	0	3
Rural	20	13	4
Rural Multi-Lot	3	0	0
Bareland Condominium	0	0	0
TOTAL	23	13	7

*Other -- Public use/institutional facilities, shops, signs, wind turbines, hangar, propane storage, family campground, water reservoir, WTP. In 2018 Other spiked due to Jossard Water Treatment Plant.



Planning & Development

Mapping & Geographics

Get to know the region. There are abundant natural resources and many outdoor adventures to be had within our 14,000 square kilometres of forests, hills, lakes, and farmland. View our interactive web map showing key routes and destinations in Big Lakes County on our website.

2021 Activity Highlights

The County's Mapping & Geographic department is responsible for maintaining the region's Geographic Information System (GIS). Our GIS Administrator is responsible for producing and distributing maps and mapped data sets, as well as assigning addresses and approving street names.

In 2021, the County's GIS Administrator had a productive year utilizing new technology to capture imagery and volume calculations using in-house Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) with great results.

- Web-based GIS rollout was completed and nearly all users are migrated into new platform. (Completed Summer 2021)
- Access to web-based GIS from mobile devices is also working well and looking to expand.
- Back-end cleanup is ongoing.

Aerial Imaging & Custom Maps

Visit our administration office in High Prairie to request current land information maintained by the County, including hard copy versions of municipal maps. Maps and data about property, floodplains, soils, topography, zoning, streets, addresses, and other topics are available through this public service. Custom maps can be requested for specific locations

In addition to your legal land description, your property may have a civic address or a rural address: A civic address is generally used for properties within a hamlet and other urban areas. A rural address is for properties outside of hamlets, such as farms and acreages.

Rural Addressing is a standardized system, which assigns an address to rural properties throughout the County. Similar to an urban address, your rural address helps emergency services personnel, such as fire, ambulance, or police, find your property quickly in an emergency.

In rural areas each address is assigned based on your driveway, or approach into your property from the Township/Range Road network. In the hamlets each address is assigned based on the location of the lot/ parcel along the hamlet roads.

within the County, as well as its latest imagery where available. Products can be delivered electronically or be printed at various sizes for pickup at the Big Lakes County Administration Office.

- \$30 + GST for official County Wall Map (and Map book if in stock)
- \$50 + GST / hr for custom mapping



Planning & Development

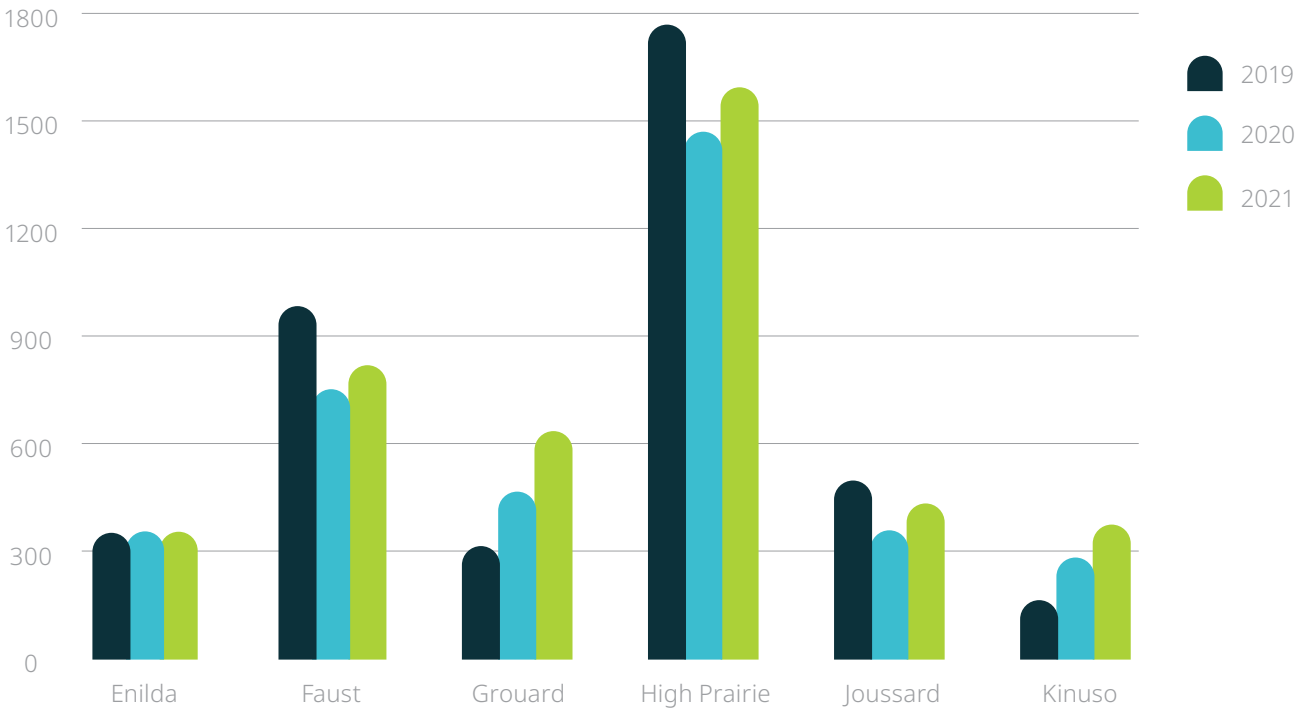
Family & Community Support Services

Big Lakes FCSS is a partnership between the Province of Alberta, Big Lakes County and the Town of High Prairie. Provincially, FCSS is mandated to provide preventative social services under the Alberta FCSS legislation.

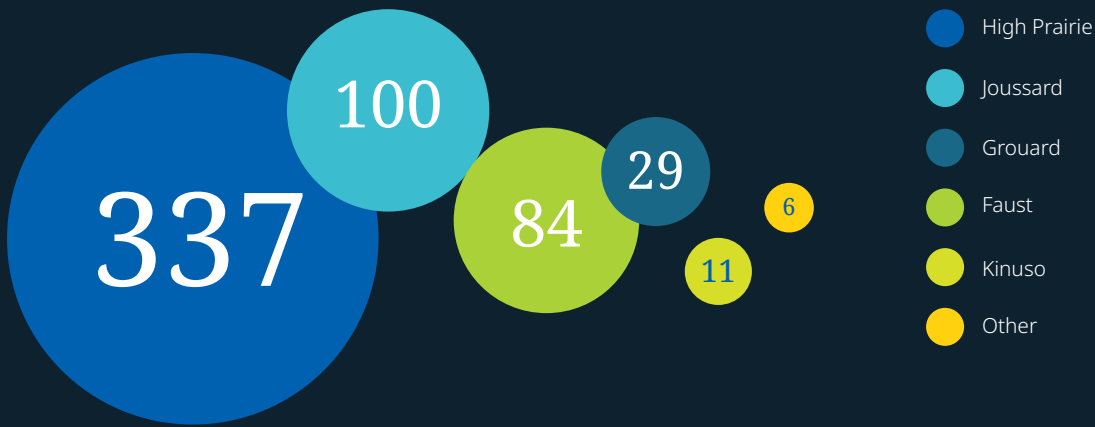
In 2021, the FCSS offices in Big Lakes County provided assistance to residents 4,228 times. This assistance was provided through their six offices and three outreach staff. Outreach staff have assisted residents

in completing government paperwork, referrals to other agencies, preparing income tax returns, and so much more. This assistance is confidential and free.

FCSS Yearly Visit Totals



Total Rides by Pick-up Locations



Big Lakes FCSS Rural Transportation Pilot Program

In 2018, Big Lakes County purchased a 12-passenger wheelchair accessible bus with the help of the Medically at Risk Driver (MARD) program through the University of Alberta to provide transportation services to County residents. The program began in

2019. In 2021, the Town of High Prairie assisted with funding to help support the bus and we were able to add a day for High Prairie residents only.

FCSS Programming & Events

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)

By providing services to low-income residents under the CVITP, Big Lakes FCSS has helped ensure that over \$2.4 million per year comes into the community. This includes federal income supplements, working income tax benefits, income tax refunds and child tax benefits. Through this program, FCSS can also help seniors determine if they are getting everything they are entitled to.

Christmas Angels

Big Lakes FCSS, with the continued generosity of donations and support from residents are able to provide Christmas hampers to families in need within the County. In 2021, we provided 66 families with hampers. Due to a generous amount of donations we were able to add additional items to the hampers.

Home Support

FCSS also provides successful home support services

to residents in need, which often allows people to remain in their own homes and communities for longer. In 2021, we had 24 clients.

Youth Program

Currently Faust is the only community with a youth program. We provide programs to ages 0-18. In 2021, we had 131 attendees.

This department also hosts several events throughout the year which include volunteer appreciation events in each hamlet to honour volunteers in all the communities on behalf of the Province of Alberta, Big Lakes County and the Town of High Prairie, Family Day events in each community and hold events to honour our seniors during Seniors Week as declared by the Province of Alberta. Due to COVID restrictions we were not able to host any events in 2021.

Corporate Services

Grants

The Grants department is responsible for both grants where the County distributes funding to local community groups and non-profit organizations, and grants where the County receives funding from other levels of government for capital projects and other initiatives.

Big Lakes County's grant program provides a broad range of funding opportunities to our community organizations whose activities provide valuable programs and services to our residents. Our various grant programs support community organizations and benefit residents by subsidizing community halls' annual operating expenses. This allows organizations to make their facilities more accessible, enhance cultural and recreational opportunities for residents, repair or improve facilities to create a safer and more enjoyable space, and support local events and initiatives. Visit biglakescounty.ca to apply for a grant today.

Total Capital Grants Awarded to Community Groups

Through the Capital Project Grant, Big Lakes County

provides a source of funds for eligible capital projects to be undertaken by community organizations that provide community services within the County. In 2021, Council granted \$64,500 in capital funding to community groups.

Total Operating Grants Awarded to Community Groups

In 2021, Council allocated \$1,174,070 to residents in need at community facilities.

- Recreation Grants —> \$854,250
- Community Halls —> \$149,500
- Museum —> \$80,000
- Seniors Programming —> \$25,500
- Events & Sponsorship —> \$59,820
- Cemetery —> \$5,000

Grants awarded to the County

FRIAA Fire Smart Program (\$60,000)

Community plan for wildfire preparedness guides and wildfire mitigation strategies.

Municipal Stimulus Initiative (\$3,057,086)

Funding went toward the Gravel Program, a Fire Command Vehicle, Loader, Road Paving in Enilda, Bridge replacement and a Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus and Fill station for the fire department.

Second Harvest (\$10,000)

FCSS food program to purchase pantry items for

residents in need at community facilities.

Watershed Resiliency & Restoration Program (\$93,775)

The County was selected to continue to partake in the Alternative Land Use Program for flood mitigation and critical flood-prevention work. Due to COVID-19 this project was delayed a year and will begin in 2022.

Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program (\$4,844,700)

Paving for the Peavine Road Rehab project and Bridge replacement.

Corporate Services

Taxation

Property taxes collected from residential and non-residential properties are one of the various revenue sources available to the County to pay for municipal services.

The Taxation department works closely with our contracted assessors to ensure that property values are properly recorded, and that taxes charged are correct.

The department also manages the collection of outstanding taxes, as well as payment of requisitions collected on behalf of the Alberta School Foundation Fund and local seniors' housing foundations.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are taxes important?

Municipalities raise funds for public services in various ways – including grant funding and user fees. However, taxes have long been a mainstay of municipal revenues and will continue to play an important role. These revenues are needed to sustain operations, infrastructure, and programs.

The primary means for municipalities to raise revenues is through property taxes. Property taxation is the process of applying a tax/mill rate to an assessed value of property to generate revenue. Rates differ among municipalities in light of various factors such as levels of services provided, the ratio of residential to commercial development, and Council priorities.

How are Property Taxes calculated?

Property assessments in Alberta are conducted

annually and must be based on the value of the property on July 1st of the previous year. For example, a 2021 property assessment will be based on the value of the property on July 1st, 2020. Most properties are assessed using a market value-based approach with a physical inspection on a four-year rotating basis. Farmland is one of the few types of property/land that are assessed under a regulated system rather than a market value.

Usually, improvements like buildings on top of land are considered in property assessments. If you have an empty parcel of land, your assessed value will be lower than the same piece of land with a home on it. Farmland has an exemption from this consideration, however, with farming buildings being exempt from assessment.



The Assessed Value is determined by our independent assessment company, Compass Assessments. The total tax rate is determined by adding the Municipal Mill Rate (set by Council), and the Education and Seniors Rate (set by the Province).

Each year, during the budgetary process, Council approves the amount of expenses required to operate the municipality. From this amount they subtract revenues. The remainder represents the amount of money needed to be raised by property taxes.

Why do I have to pay school taxes when I don't have any children in school?

The provincial government has mandated that all municipalities will collect school taxes on behalf of the provincial government. Every property owner in the province pays school taxes, regardless of whether they have children in school. While the County bills and collects school taxes, the County has no jurisdiction or control over school board budgets or operations. Each year the province calculates the amount that each municipality must contribute towards the education system. The calculation is based on a formula that includes the amount of assessment in each municipality.

Are there any Property Tax programs for seniors?

The Alberta Government offers the Seniors Property Tax Deferral Program that allows eligible senior homeowners to defer all or part of their property taxes through a low-interest home equity loan with the Alberta Government. If you qualify, the Alberta Government will pay your residential property taxes to the municipality on your behalf. You re-pay the loan, with interest, when you move or sell the home, or sooner if you wish.

What would cause my Property Assessment to change when I have not changed anything on my property?

As properties are assessed annually, based on a mass appraisal approach, market values will influence the assessed value. Even though you may not have changed anything on your property, assessed values change based on the change in market values year to year.

What will happen if I do not pay my Property Taxes on time?

If Big Lakes County doesn't receive full payment on time, you will be subjected to late payment penalties. Please refer to our Big Lakes County Bylaw No. 02-2019 on late penalties.

Who gives an Assessor the authority to enter or inspect my property?

The Municipal Government Act provides the assessor the right to enter on and inspect a property to carry out their duties and responsibilities. Big Lakes County notifies residents when the Assessors will be doing inspections by posting on their social media pages (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter) and on our Big

Lakes County website.

The Municipal Government Act (s.294) grants the authority for an assessor to enter on and inspect a property. Big Lakes County notifies ratepayers that inspections will be occurring within a specific area of the County, during a specified timeframe.

Property owners are also notified that an assessor may visit their property when they apply for a development permit. Inspections will occur annually in areas of the County designated for re-inspection, where permits have been approved, and where known changes have occurred.

MGA s. 294(1) After giving reasonable notice to the owner or occupier of any property, an assessor may at any reasonable time, for the purpose of carrying out the duties and responsibilities of the assessor under Parts 9 to 12 and the regulations,

- a. enter on and inspect the property,
- b. request anything to be produced, and
- c. make copies of anything necessary to the inspection.

How can I appeal my assessment?

Property owners cannot appeal tax rates, but they can appeal the assessed value of their property.

The *Municipal Government Act* allows for formal complaints on their property assessment to be heard by the Assessment Review Board. It is suggested the property owners with concerns about their assessment contact our Assessors before filing a formal complaint. Compass Assessment Consultants Inc. can be reached toll free at 1 (800) 251-9711.

After filing a complaint you must still pay your taxes by the due date to avoid penalties. If a decision on your complaint results in a lower tax levy, you will be credited the appropriate amount.

I have filed a complaint regarding the assessment of my property. Do I still need to pay my property taxes?

Yes. You must still pay your taxes by the due date to avoid penalties. If a decision on your complaint results in a lower tax levy, you will be credited the appropriate amount.

Still have question?

Contact our Tax and Assessment Clerk by emailing taxes@biglakescounty.ca or calling our office.



Corporate Services

Financial Statements Breakdown

The Financial Breakdown section of the Annual Report is prepared by management in accordance with the principles and standards established by the Public Sector Accounting Board (PSAB) of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, as well as the Municipal Government Act and provincial and federal regulations.

The Financial Breakdown aims to provide commentary on the past year's financial results, including a summary of the sources, allocation and use of the economic resources, while capturing significant differences between the reported year and previous year as well as budgeted and actual results.

Management has made every effort to ensure the financial statements present a fair accounting of the County's consolidated operating and capital activities for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2021. The County's financial results are recognized and reported in observation of the County's policies and bylaws, where Council provides governance and guidance to policy and bylaw changes and approval.

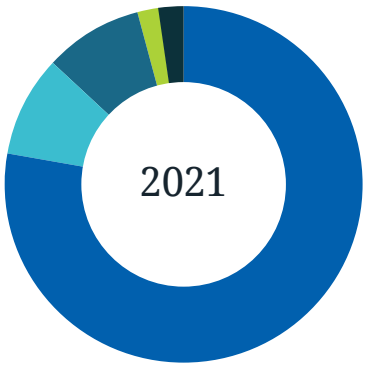
Operating Revenues & Expenses

The County's revenue totaled \$29.5 million in 2021; an increase of 0.8% from the prior year. Most of the revenue that the County collects comes from property taxes, and the majority of property tax revenue is generated from linear properties as discussed below. Expenses totaled \$26.8 million in 2021, a decrease of 16.1% from 2020.

Operating Revenues Composition

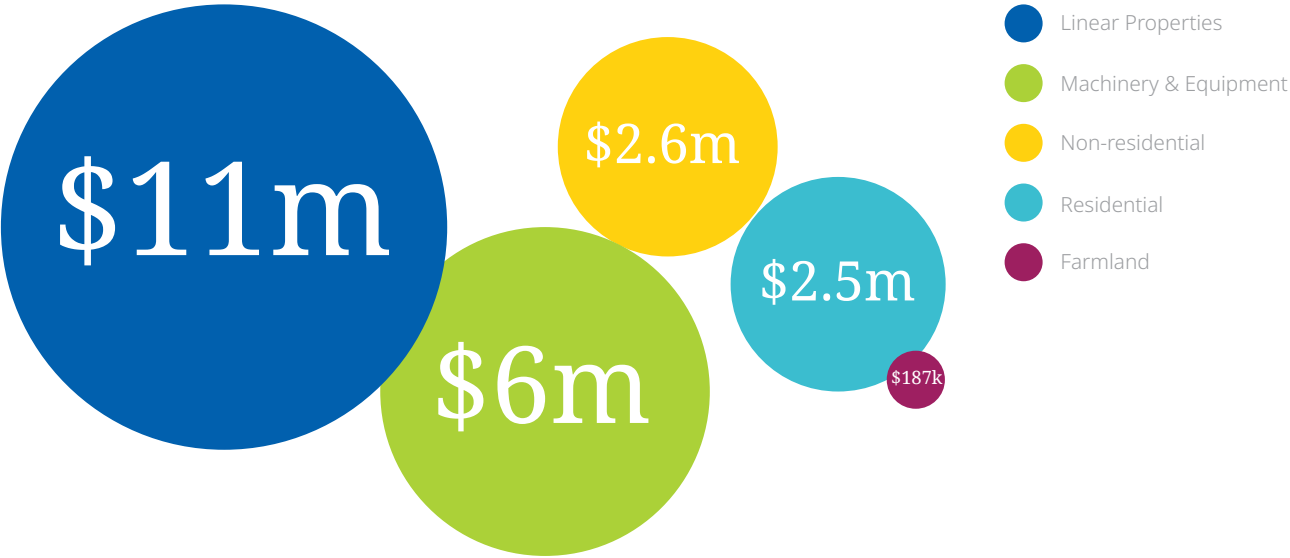
Revenue from property taxes continues to comprise approximately 78% of the County's operating revenues. Taxation revenue decreased by 2.0% in 2021 resulting from negative adjustments in the property assessment base, offset by an increase in

tax rates. Most of Big Lakes County's tax revenue is generated from non-residential, machinery and equipment and linear properties, many of which are a part of the oil and gas sector. User fees and sales of goods make up another significant source of revenue; most of these amounts come from water and sewer charges. Penalties and costs on taxes saw a significant decrease from \$1.2M in 2020, to \$0.3M in 2021, due to the collection of several delinquent accounts in 2020 and 2021, which resulted in a reduction in Property Tax Penalty Revenue.



Property Taxes	78%
User Fees & Sales of Goods	9%
Gov't Transfers for Operating	9%
Interest & Investment Income	2%
Other	2%
Oil Well Drilling Taxes	0%

Tax Revenue Trends by Source



Assessment & Mill Rate

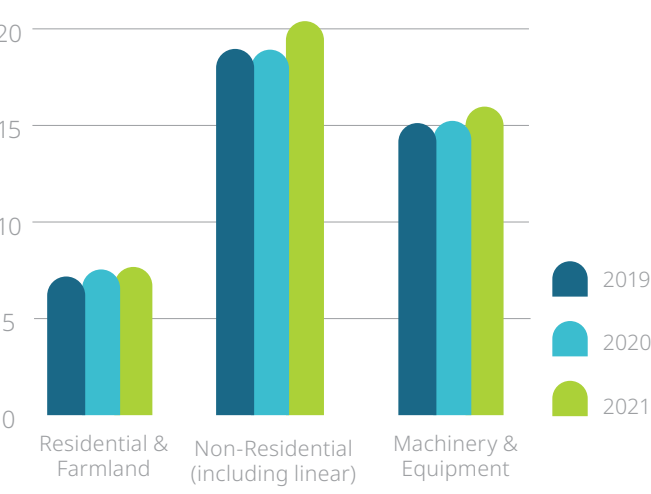
In 2021, Big Lakes County increased municipal taxes for residential and farmland properties slightly to 4.727 “mills” or an effective tax rate of 0.004727% per \$1,000 of assessed value. This means that if a property were assessed at \$100,000, the municipal taxes payable would have been \$472.70 (\$450.20 – 2020). The increase to residential and farmland properties was a 5.00% increase over 2020 mill rates. Non-residential and machinery & equipment municipal tax rates increased from 14.720 mills in 2020, to 15.456 mills in 2021, which represents a 5.00% increase over 2020 tax rates for these property types.

While the municipal tax rate is the only one that is controlled by Big Lakes County, landowners are also charged taxes to support the Alberta School Foundation Fund (ASFF), local seniors’ housing foundations, and for some specialized designated industrial properties, an additional requisition. Per section 359.3(2)(3) of the *Municipal Government Act*: “The Minister must set the property tax rate for the designated industrial property requisition. The property tax rate for the designated industrial property requisition must be the same for all designated property.” Amounts collected for ASFF, seniors’ foundations and for designated industrial properties are requisitioned by these organizations—Big Lakes County is given a dollar amount to collect, and the amount is allocated among all the assessed property value within the County.

2021 Combined Tax Rate

	Residential & Farmland	Non- Residential	Machinery & Equipment
Municipal	4.727	15.456	15.456
School	2.5247	4.3736	0
Seniors	0.25800	0.25800	0.25800
Designated Industrial	0.0760	0.0760	0.0760
TOTAL	7.5857	20.1636	15.7900

Combined Tax Rate Trends



Assessed Values by Property Type

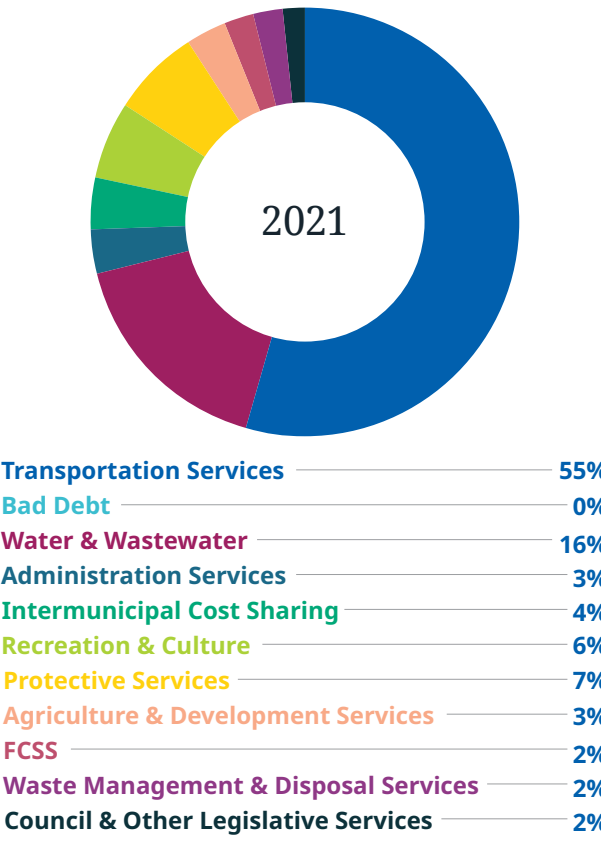
	2019	2020	2021
Farmland	35,735,890	35,751,990	35,748,610
Residential	532,253,290	541,398,060	544,012,410
Machinery & Equip.	409,322,480	396,803,900	390,437,060
Non-residential	186,824,190	190,099,880	174,550,000
Linear Properties	797,832,110	778,507,370	702,214,320
Linear (Power Gen.)	20,428,790	20,596,390	13,894,580
TOTAL	1,982,396,750	1,963,157,590	1,860,856,980

Property Value Trends

While the County experienced stable property values in Farmland, Residential and Machinery and Equipment, property values for both Non-Residential and Linear declined in 2021.

The substantial decrease in Non-Residential and Linear property values can be attributed to an overall reduction in value of many petroleum and power generation facilities throughout the region.

Operating Expense Composition



Of all the services that the County provides for residents and ratepayers, transportation services come at the highest overall cost. The County maintains 1,351 km of roadways. Transportation costs include both summer and winter road maintenance, gravelling, bridge inspections and maintenance, as well as clearing brush and ditches. Other significant costs include the treatment, distribution, and management of potable water and wastewater, as well administrative services, and cost-sharing agreements.

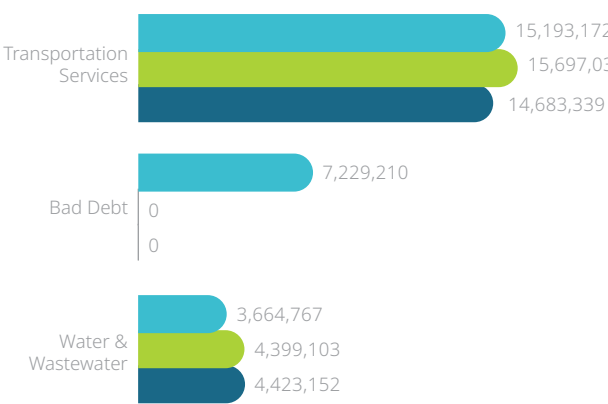
2021 Operating Expenses

	2020	2021
Transportation Services	15,193,172	14,683,339
Bad Debt	7,229,210	-
Water & Wastewater	3,664,767	4,423,152
Administration Services	1,459,588	923,704
Intermunicipal Cost Sharing	1,180,825	1,055,361
Recreation & Culture	1,737,207	1,537,561
Protective Services	2,060,377	1,820,970
Agriculture & Devel. Services	839,727	800,501
FCSS	498,291	578,666
Waste Mgmt & Disposal Services	659,386	590,834
Council & other Legislative Services	373,026	424,172
TOTAL	31,976,400	26,838,260

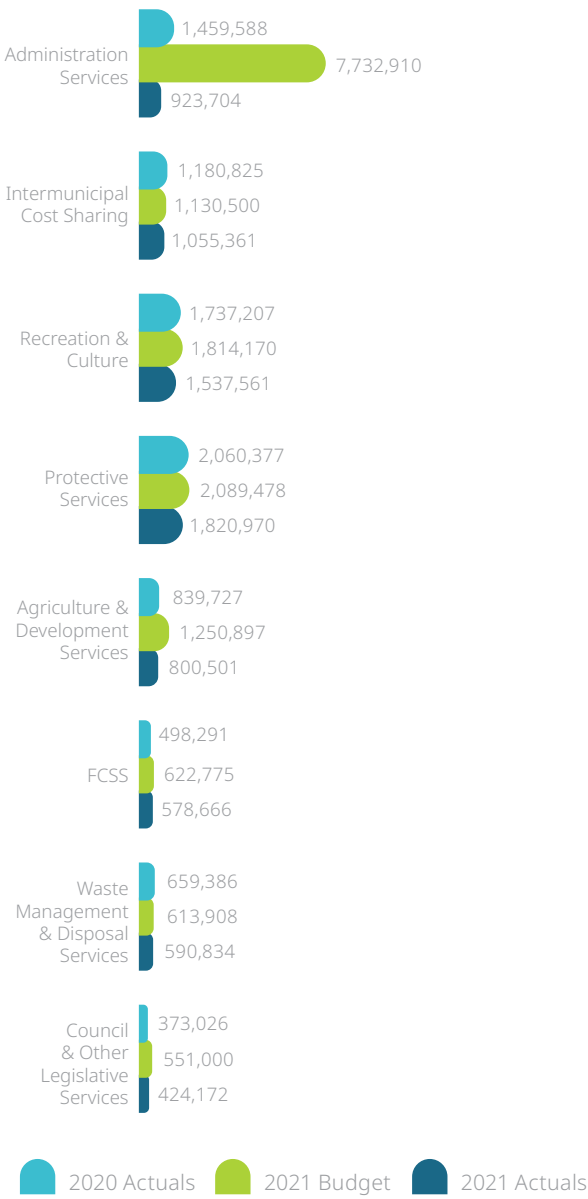
Expense Trends

Expenses in 2021 saw a significant decrease, mainly due to the reduction in Administration Services. This variance was due to the collection of several delinquent accounts throughout the year, and not requiring the anticipated Bad Debt Expense of \$4.5M.

2021 Actuals vs. 2021 Budget and 2020 Actuals



2021 Actuals vs. 2021 Budget and 2020 Actuals Cont...



Debt & Reserves

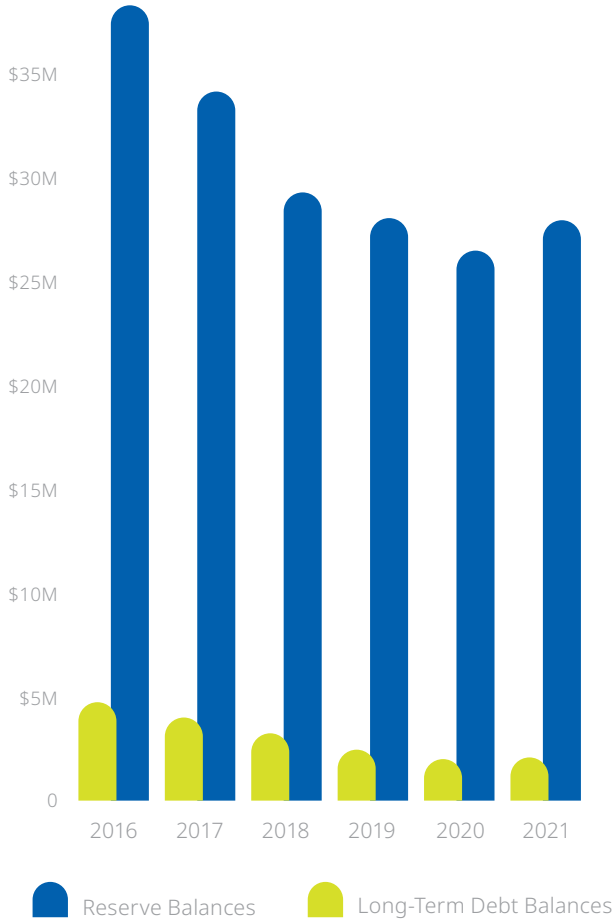
While operating revenue in 2021 increased by 0.75% from 2020, expenses decreased by 16.07%. These combined trends mean that the County generated a deficit of \$0.22 million before other revenue and expenses. A deficit occurs when a municipality's expenditures are greater than its revenues. When a deficit occurs, the shortfall must be funded by either drawing funds from reserves (savings, or surplus funds from good years), or taking on debt.

Reserve funds are set aside by Council to fund specific

projects or initiatives. The County continued to draw from reserves to fund both operations and capital projects in 2021, resulting in a \$10.3 million decrease from the highest reserve balances in 2016.

Most municipalities in Alberta borrow from the Alberta Capital Finance Authority (ACFA) when they do not have sufficient funds, particularly for larger infrastructure projects like new roads and bridges.

The Municipal Government Act regulates the amount of debt that municipalities are allowed to take on, as it is important that municipalities have the capacity to repay debt when it is due. Big Lakes County continues to carry a very low debt load, and as of December 31, 2021, has only used 4.7% of its available debt limit.



Consolidated Financial Statements

Big Lakes County's Consolidated Financial Statements for the year ended December 31, 2021, can be found on our website at www.biglakescounty.ca. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Director of Corporate Services at 780 523 5955.

Contact Us

If you have inquiries about the 2021 Annual Report, direct them by mail or phone at:

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www.biglakescounty.ca

Big Lakes County

We're on social media!
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IG : [@biglakescounty](https://www.instagram.com/biglakescounty)
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departments, offices and agencies.

2021

Annual Report



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