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(U) A “Museum of Government Folly”: The Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile System in North Central Montana, 1968-1977



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(U) Executive Summary

(U) The Department of Defense announced the Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile system would come to north central Montana in 1968. The town of Conrad received a steady stream of federal funds to mitigate the impact of military construction in the region. This took the form of sewer system expansion, school construction, and road maintenance. The rest came via workers' wages; area residents either created new businesses or expanded existing ones to meet people's needs for housing, leisure, etc. However, as part of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty the United States agreed to terminate construction on the Montana Safeguard site in 1972. Almost as quickly as federal funds flooded the region, they receded, leaving north-central Montana residents in the lurch. In response the federal government spent millions of dollars on projects to stabilize Conrad's economy. Many area workers and businesses felt an immediate impact President Richard M. Nixon's Inter-Agency Economic Adjustment Committee visited the region to assist small scale industrial development and bolster the region's agricultural base. The Committee worked with area residents to organize an economic development corporation that recruited light industry to Pondera County and facilitated the turnover of Safeguard's water system to provide water to almost 280 farms and households. These efforts helped stabilize the economy over the long term.

(U) Introduction

(U) Over 50 years ago, residents of Cascade, Liberty, Pondera, and Toole counties braced themselves for an influx of federal money that could change the region for generations. In 1969 the Department of Defense (DoD) identified eastern North Dakota and north central Montana as locations for the first phase of President Richard M. Nixon's Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) system. This project required the construction of a missile site radar (MSR), perimeter acquisition radar (PAR), and Sprint and Spartan missile batteries that would protect Malmstrom AFB's Minuteman intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) fields by intercepting an incoming Soviet ICBM. The construction of this system would cost roughly \$64 million and employ approximately 3,500 people during construction, with upwards of 700 military and civilian personnel manning the site once active.¹

¹ (U) "Site Surveys Start Soon...Anti-Ballistic Missile Program," *Great Falls Tribune*, 20 Nov 68; Kristin Inbody, "'Museum of government folly' and Cold War fear sits on Montana prairie," *Great Falls Tribune*, 20 Feb 18, <https://www.greatfallstribune.com/story/news/2018/02/20/museum-government-folly-and-cold-war-fear-sits-montana-prairie/351279002/>, accessed on 9 May 24.

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(U) This history of Safeguard in north central Montana is short but consequential.² A project of this size could have a massive effect on the small farming communities that dotted the Montana plains. Conrad, an agricultural community since its founding in 1909, felt this change most acutely.³ As the largest town in the region Army personnel anticipated most workers would flock to Conrad for housing, medical care, and day-to-day needs. One Army Corps of Engineers officer told Conrad residents, “We’re going to double the size of this town in three or four years.”⁴ However, in 1972 the United States entered the ABM treaty with the Soviet Union. This limited the United States to one Safeguard site in North Dakota. The DoD canceled the project in Montana, leaving thousands of workers in the region without jobs. It then spent over \$600,000 restoring the MSR and PAR sites but left the PAR’s concrete structure outside Ledger in place. The United States Army (USA) estimated that the entire Safeguard program resulted in \$481 million of “lost effort.”⁵

(U) In response, the federal government poured millions of dollars into north central Montana to stabilize its economy. Initially these impact funds were intended to assist Conrad and Shelby with absorbing an influx of people for Safeguard’s construction. However, after the DoD terminated the project numerous federal agencies spent even more money to offset massive

² (U) The historical literature on the Safeguard ABM program focuses on its relevance as a military program. Unlike previous histories this study looks at how the Safeguard ABM construction affected its surrounding community. See Gregory S. Bowen, “SAFEGUARD: North Dakota’s Front Line in the Cold War,” (MA Thesis, University of North Dakota, 2004); Alexander Flax, “Ballistic Missile Defense: Concepts and History,” *Daedalus* Vol. 114, No. 2 (Spring, 1985), Pgs. 33-51; Richard A. Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military, 1969-1973* (Washington, D.C., 2015), Pgs. 395-431; James H. Kitchens, III, *A History of the Huntsville Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1967-1976*, (Huntsville, AL, 1978), Pgs. 1-113; David W. Mills, *Cold War in a Cold Land: Fighting Communism on the Northern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), Pgs. 216-235; G. Spinardi, “The Rise and Fall of Safeguard,” *History and Technology* Vol. 26, No. 4 (December, 2010), Pgs. 313-334; U.S. Army Center for Military History, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense, Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C., 2009).

³ (U) Georgianna Borgen, *A Town is Born (Conrad, Montana), 1903-1930* (1995), <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/64370>, accessed on 16 May 24; Dorothy Floerchinger and Alicia O’Brien, *Conrad: 75 Years of Pride and Progress* (Conrad, MT, 1984), <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/64374>, accessed on 16 May 24; Pondera History Association, *A History of Pondera County and its Settlers, Communities, and Institutions* (1973), <https://www.mtmemory.org/nodes/view/5605?lsk=eff64b664d335b48bbd900906e98cfb2>, accessed on 16 May 24.

⁴ (U) Inbody, “‘Museum of government folly.’”

⁵ (U) Kelley to Aspin, letter w/enclosure, 21 May 74, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/b-164250-095777.pdf>, accessed on 17 Dec 24.

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layoffs and private investment in support of the project.⁶ In 1973 Representative Robert Leggett of California called the Montana Safeguard site “one of the champion taxpayer-fleeces of all time.” He hoped “some public-spirited soul will pick up the property and develop it into a titanium plated museum of government folly.”⁷



Image 01: The defunct Perimeter Acquisition Radar site east of Ledger, Montana in 2024, SD 9000.

(U) The Safeguard Anti-Ballistic Missile Program

(U) The Safeguard program was part of a long development in Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD). According to historian Alexander Flax, “ballistic missile defense was regarded by many as a natural extension of the concepts concerning guided missile systems for air defense.”⁸ After World War II the United States Air Force utilized the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment radar system to assist fighter-interceptor squadrons in intercepting Soviet long-range bombers

⁶ (U) The Office of Economic Adjustment, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Installations & Logistics), “Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana,” Nov 72, S17, N137, F2, Mike Mansfield Papers (*MMP*), Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, The University of Montana-Missoula.

⁷ (U) Inbody, ““Museum of government folly.””

⁸ (U) Flax, “Ballistic Missile Defense,” Pg. 34.

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over North American air space.⁹ However, after the Soviet Union developed and successfully launched its own ICBM, along with the proliferation of nuclear weapons by both sides, the DoD realized that the “distinction between area and terminal defense was less relevant in an age of nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.”¹⁰ The Army soon owned the BMD mission and utilized surface-to-air missiles to protect military and civilian targets.¹¹

(U) After the Army took over the DoD’s BMD program it developed a series of radar and missile technologies to intercept an incoming ballistic missile. In early 1957, the Army developed Nike Zeus, a system of radars and high-altitude interceptor missiles. In December 1962 it successfully intercepted an Atlas D missile. However, during this period the Army turned its attention to counter measures such as decoy reentry vehicles. Engineers realized that a BMD system could address decoys by intercepting warheads at low altitudes; the atmosphere slowed down their reentry and burned up less massive bodies thus revealing the actual warhead. The Army’s response to this problem was the Nike-X, a system that identified incoming warheads with new phased array radar technology and intercepted them with a Sprint missile at a low altitude.¹² By 1967, several studies recommended a BMD program for the terminal defense of the Minuteman ICBM missile fields against a heavy Soviet attack. The program that emerged was called Sentinel.¹³

(U) Unfortunately for President Lyndon B. Johnson’s administration, opponents of the Sentinel program organized a grassroots movement to fight its deployment. Sentinel was a combination of the Nike Zeus and Nike-X programs. Under this layered approach the PAR performed long range surveillance and tracked incoming warheads to support the Spartan missile’s high-altitude interception with Nike-X missiles targeting re-entry vehicles at a lower altitude. According to historian Richard A. Hunt, “of the 15 proposed Sentinel sites, 8 were close to population centers of a million or more.”¹⁴ As a result, organizations like the West Suburban Concerned Scientists Group was dedicated to halting Sentinel deployment near Chicago, Illinois.

⁹ (U) On SAGE and the fighter-interceptor mission see Kenneth Schaffel, *The Emerging Shield: The Air Force and the Evolution of Continental Air Defense, 1945-1960* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1991), Pgs. 197-217, 224-235; Hist (U), Troy A. Hallsell, 341 MW/HO, “(U) ‘A \$100 million white elephant’: Glasgow AFB, Montana, 1955-2012,” 11 Jul 23, Pgs. 3-10.

¹⁰ (U) Flax, “Ballistic Missile Defense,” Pg. 34.

¹¹ (U) Ibid, Pgs. 34-37, 39-43.

¹² (U) On the phased-array radar see Alan J. Fenn, et al, “The Development of Phased-Array Radar Technology,” *Lincoln Laboratory Journal* Vol 12, No. 2 (2000), Pgs. 321-340.

¹³ (U) Flax, “Ballistic Missile Defense,” Pgs. 34-36; United States Army Center for Military History, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense, Vol. 2*, (Washington, D.C., 2009), Pgs. 179-206.

¹⁴ (U) Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military*, Pg. 397.

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It claimed that “deploying a ballistic missile defense in Chicago would make the city a target for ICBMs while at the same time introducing the possibility of a nuclear explosion at the site or, in an attack, the possibility of a low altitude intercept wherein the Sentinel missile would destroy the city it was defending.”¹⁵ The American Federation of Scientists soon joined the protest and debates around Sentinel deployment emerged all over the nation. On 4 February 1969, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird halted the project pending a 30-day review.¹⁶

(U) President Nixon modified the Sentinel program to match the growing Soviet threat. On 14 March 1969, President Richard M. Nixon announced his new BMD plan: Safeguard.¹⁷ The Safeguard ABM system consisted of a mix of radars and missiles to intercept a Soviet ICBM. The PAR was a large passive electronically scanned array radar that detected incoming ballistic missile warheads as they crossed over the North Pole. The PAR sent potential targets to the MSR and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The MSR was the brains of the Safeguard system. It housed the computers and the phased array radar necessary to track and intercept an incoming reentry vehicle. According to historian Gary S. Bowen, “Once the threat RV came within range...the MSR...provided the final fire control solutions for the system and guided the interceptors toward their targets.”¹⁸ Safeguard utilized a layered defense. It used Spartan missiles to intercept the incoming reentry vehicles outside the Earth’s atmosphere. If the Spartan failed to hit its target the short-range Sprint missile would intercept the incoming warhead within the atmosphere. The DoD planned to build 12 Safeguard ABM sites across the United States.¹⁹

¹⁵ (U) USACMH, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense, Vol. 2*, Pgs. 214-215. See also Samuel D. Lair, “Defenses in Dispute: The Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics of the First Anti-Ballistic Missile Debate,” (Honors Thesis, Trinity University, 2022), Pgs. 88-92.

¹⁶ (U) Flax, “Ballistic Missile Defense,” Pg. 36; USACMH, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense, Vol. 2*, Pgs. 210-215. On the DoD’s ABM review see Hunt, *Melvin Laird and the Foundation of the Post-Vietnam Military*, Pgs. 397-403.

¹⁷ (U) President Nixon renamed the ABM system SAFEGUARD to emphasize its role in protecting the United States.

¹⁸ (U) Bowen, “SAFEGUARD,” Pg. 11.

¹⁹ (U) USACMH, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense, Vol. 2*, Pgs. 216-218.

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|--|-----------|-----|---------|--------|
| Location | Equipment | | | |
| | PAR | MSR | Spartan | Sprint |
| Northwest | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Central California | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Southern California | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Malmstrom AFB | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Warren AFB | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Grand Forks AFB | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Whiteman AFB | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Texas | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Michigan/Ohio | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Southern New England | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Washington, D.C. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Florida/Georgia | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Source: U.S. Army Center for Military History, <i>History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense</i> , Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 2009), Pg. 216. | | | | |
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(U) Despite the Nixon administration's enthusiasm for the Safeguard program, it faced an uphill battle in Congress. In March 1969 presidential advisor Bryce Harlow informed President Nixon that getting Safeguard through Congress would require "maximum effort, including all-out Presidential participation."²⁰ Advisor Patrick Buchanan suggested the President "make full use of the resource of the government to attack opponents" like Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy.²¹ However, Gen Al Haig, one of Henry Kissinger's military assistants suggested a moderate approach. Nixon used the bully pulpit and "alternately cajoled and berated both supporters and opponents" but told his staff to "concentrate on those [senators] who are on the fence and only on those where we have a chance to win."²² After the confrontational Safeguard congressional debates during the summer of 1969 the Senate Armed Services Committee approved a funding bill on a 10-7 vote, and on 6 August, the Senate endorsed Nixon's Safeguard program on a narrow 51-48 margin. On 8 December 1969 the House of Representatives approved \$359.5 million in Safeguard deployment monies and another \$400.9 million for research and development. On 16 December the Senate approved the appropriation by an 85-4 vote. Phase one of the Safeguard program could move forward.²³

²⁰ (U) Quoted in Spinardi, "The Rise and Fall of Safeguard," Pg. 9.

²¹ (U) Ibid.

²² (U) Ibid, Pg. 11.

²³ (U) Lair, "Defenses in Dispute," Pgs. 102-107; Spinardi, "The Rise and Fall of Safeguard," Pgs. 313-334; USACMH, *History of Strategic Air and Ballistic Missile Defense*, Vol. 2, Pg. 218-223.

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(U) Safeguard Comes to Montana

(U) Residents of north central Montana learned about the Army's plan to deploy an anti-ballistic missile system to Montana in November 1968. On 14 November 1968, the *Great Falls Tribune* announced to its readers that the area would welcome workers to conduct a site location survey for an ABM system.²⁴ After an official briefing on Malmstrom AFB five days later, area civic and business leaders learned the survey focused on four to six locations near the Tiber Reservoir and the towns of Conrad, Valier, Shelby, and Dutton. Department of Defense officials told attendees that the construction project could employ upwards of 800 people, while the active ABM site might employ between 400 and 700 uniformed personnel with an annual payroll between \$2.5 and \$3 million. *Tribune* journalists compared the ABM project's economic benefits to that of Minuteman ICBM construction in the early 1960s.²⁵ Given the anticipated money that would pour into the economy, local officials believed the ABM program would "have a terrific impact on area businesses, schools, law enforcement, the labor market, and highway traffic."²⁶ Local leaders promised to cooperate with the entire program.²⁷

(U) Montana residents had a range of opinions on the Army's ABM system. Some believed the program threatened the lives of central Montana residents. John Lahr criticized the Conrad Chamber of Commerce for an outright money grab at the expense of the town's safety. "I'm sure the prospect of ringing cash registers is a very potent force in decisions of this kind," he wrote. But "let's not get sucked into endorsing a military scheme...and kill everybody in our town if its ever used."²⁸ Others supported it. Conrad Mayor Robert Arnot attended a four-day tour on the importance of the ABM program sponsored by the Army in the summer of 1969. Arnot, along with six other representatives from Great Falls and Shelby, visited Ft. Bliss, Texas to witness an ABM launch, followed by a trip to the White Sands Firing Range in New Mexico and a tour of NORAD in Colorado Springs, Colorado. While initially skeptical, upon Arnot's return he told the *Independent Observer* that he was "now sold on the necessity of the ABM defense program."²⁹

²⁴ (U) "Great Falls Considered For Sentinel Missiles," *Great Falls Tribune*, 14 Nov 68.

²⁵ (U) See Troy Hallsell, "Building Malmstrom's Minuteman Missile Fields in Central Montana, 1960-1963," *Air Power History* Vol. 68, No. 1 (Spring, 2021), Pgs. 5-16.

²⁶ (U) "Site Surveys Start Soon...Anti-Ballistic Missile Program," *Great Falls Tribune*, 20 Nov 68.

²⁷ (U) "Site Surveys Start Soon...Anti-Ballistic Missile Program," *Great Falls Tribune*, 20 Nov 68; Henderson to Mansfield, letter, 4 Apr 69, S10, B208, F2, *MMP*.

²⁸ (U) "Letters to the Editor," *Independent Observer*, 27 Feb 69.

²⁹ (U) "Mayor Arnot 'sold' on missile defense," *Independent Observer*, 18 Sep 69.

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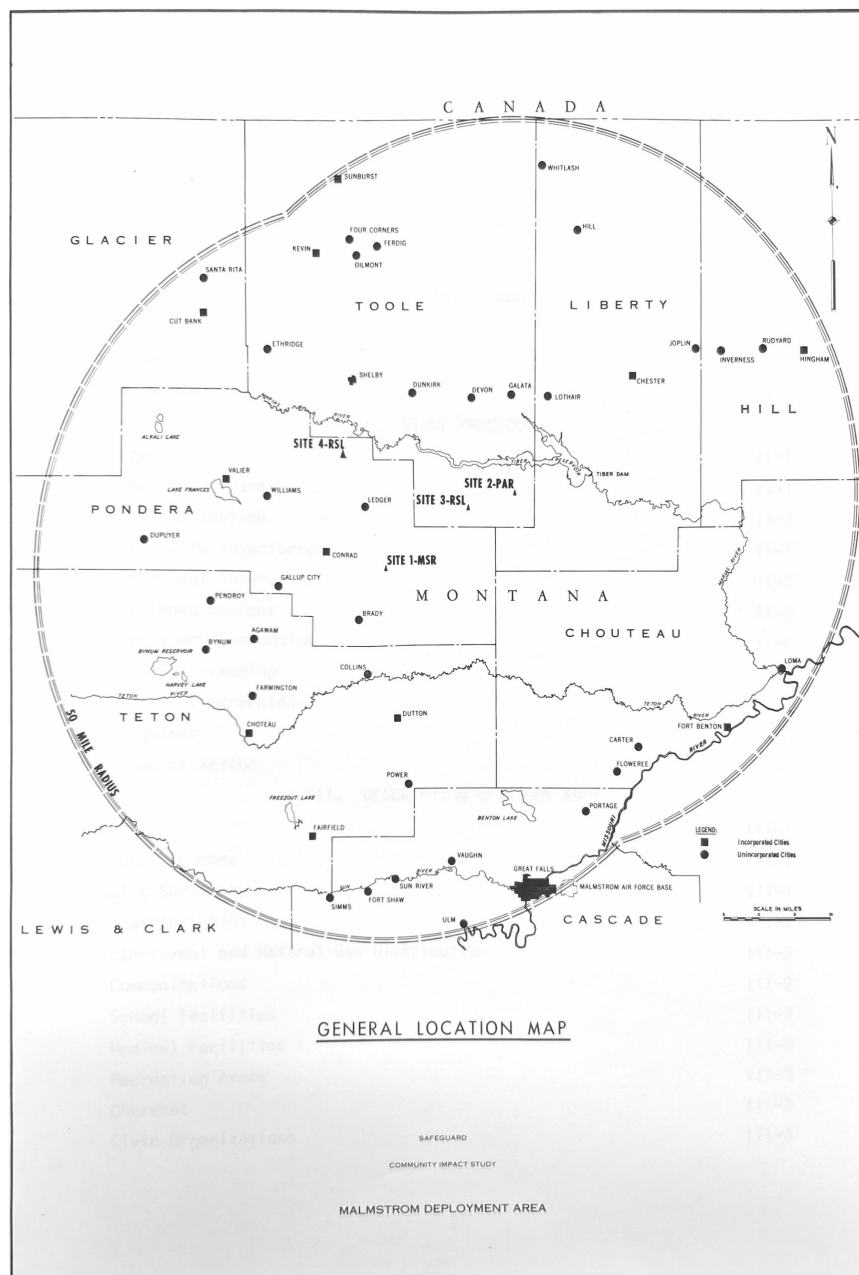


Image02: General Location Map, SAFEGUARD, Community Impact Study, Malmstrom Deployment Area, Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army Engineer District, Omaha, Nebraska, *U.S. Army Safeguard System Command Community Impact Report, Malmstrom Deployment Area*, (Omaha, NE, Jul 1970), Pg. ii, SD 9001.

(U) Others resigned themselves to the program's inevitability. Ronald Denzer, a former radar operator for the Army and Conrad resident, believed it was too late to speak out against Safeguard. In his mind the Army was going to build an ABM site nearby. Since the federal government would spend this money, it made "more sense to spend eight or ten billion defending our home than spending 30 billion a year...in Vietnam." Besides, he "would much rather see the white flash of [a Soviet ICBM] being destroyed hundreds of miles away than to feel the intense

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heat of it exploding in the vicinity of Conrad.”³⁰ In an *Independent Observer* editorial, the newspaper took an ambivalent position: “If the Conrad area is chosen, it will be our responsibility to adjust ourselves accordingly to the growing pains that are sure to accompany it.”³¹ Not exactly a ringing endorsement.

(U) In October 1969 the DoD announced that Pondera and Toole Counties would become home to a Safeguard ABM complex. The Army located the MSR seven miles east-southeast of Conrad on 290 acres near the Iren DeStaffany and John Wood farms; the PAR approximately 29.5 miles east of Conrad on 290 acres near Ledger in the vicinity of the Orlo and Erwin Underdahl farms; and two remote launch sites about six miles south of Shelby and another south of the Tiber Reservoir on 50 acres each.³² Survey crews began surveying ABM roads in November 1969. Construction began in early 1970 and would continue over a 33-month period followed by equipment installation and testing before the site became active. The USACE anticipated the construction project to bring approximately 3,500 people to the region in 1971 and reach a peak of 9,000 during a six-month period in 1972. The Army expected this number to level off to 4,000 in 1974.³³

(U) Federal and local officials identified several impact areas Conrad would face with this influx of people. At the Safeguard system brief on 30 October 1969, the USACE noted that the arriving construction workers could strain the already tight housing market in the region. Once the PAR and MSR became operational, however, the Army would provide housing for its uniformed workforce.³⁴ The USACE also claimed that Safeguard construction would not present a major problem to Conrad’s schools, but it did identify 1973-1974 as the year with the largest increase of students.³⁵ Robert Singleton, the superintendent of schools in Conrad, noted that the high school was at capacity but believed the three elementary schools could absorb 200-250 additional students. “As far as we’re concerned, everything is unofficial” but “at least we’re alerted to it,” he said.³⁶ This gave the school district time to plan for an influx of students and acquire portable buildings for additional class space if necessary.³⁷

³⁰ (U) “Letters to the Editor,” *Independent Observer*, 13 Mar 69.

³¹ (U) “As I see It,” *Independent Observer*, 27 Mar 69.

³² (U) “Conrad gets nod for ABM sites,” *Independent Observer*, 23 Oct 69.

³³ (U) “Civic leaders hear briefing on Safeguard System,” *Independent Observer*, 30 Oct 69; “Survey crews started on missile roads,” *Independent Observer*, 27 Nov 69.

³⁴ (U) “Civic leaders hear briefing on Safeguard System,” *Independent Observer*, 30 Oct 69.

³⁵ (U) Ibid.

³⁶ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “Plan for Student Influx: Schools Eye ABMs,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 22 Oct 69.

³⁷ (U) Ibid.

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(U) With more questions than answers regarding Safeguard's effect on Conrad, a group of Pondera County residents created the Pondera Action Council (PAC) to acquire information on the ABM project. It consisted of a wide array of local officials and concerned citizens to include members of the Pondera County Board of Commissioners, City-County planning board, Hospital Board, Ambulance Service, Conrad school district, the Chamber of Commerce, Taxpayer's Association, and representatives from the communities of Brady and Valier. The PAC sent numerous questions regarding school funding and student increases, hospital expansion, road funding, and housing to Senator Mike Mansfield's office with the hope he could assist with some of these issues.³⁸ The organization also created a coordinating committee to improve communication between Pondera County's civic organizations and federal representatives.³⁹ This approach worked. In the weeks that followed Montana congressman Arnold Olsen contacted the Secretary of Defense and requested the DoD establish a Safeguard information office in Conrad. He believed this office "should work with the citizens and community leaders to insure [*sic*] that this once small and stable community will not be left in shambles."⁴⁰ By late March 1970, the Army relocated the liaison office from Great Falls to the second floor of the Product Credit Association building at the corner of Fourth and Main Street in Conrad. Olsen was "confident this new arrangement will help close the gap which had developed."⁴¹

(U) As the PAC worked Montana's congressional delegation and Army officials for information, the USACE collected data for its Community Impact Study. In February 1970, Col Lowell Dezarn, Chief Engineer, Corps of Engineers, ABM System, notified the PAC that USACE "would evaluate the potential impact of the development of the Safeguard System in communities in the vicinities of the sites."⁴² He anticipated the entire study to be complete by early June but stated the USACE would release the school-related impact data on 6 April. This allowed the county's school districts to incorporate this information into the planning for the 1970-71 school year.⁴³

(U) In July 1970, the USACE released its community impact report.⁴⁴ It surveyed 20 communities within a 50-mile radius of the ABM sites and explored topics such as population

³⁸ (U) Keil to Mansfield, letter, 19 Feb 1970, S17, B135, F3, *MMP*.

³⁹ (U) "Lack of ABM info spurs Pondera Action Council," *Independent Observer*, 19 Feb 70.

⁴⁰ (U) "Olsen seeks ABM information office for Conrad," *Independent Observer*, 5 Mar 70.

⁴¹ (U) "Safeguard liaison office now located in Conrad," *Independent Observer*, 26 Mar 70.

⁴² (U) "Lack of ABM info spurs Pondera Action Council," *Independent Observer*, 19 Feb 70.

⁴³ (U) "ABM officials say 'no impact on schools for year 1970-71,'" *Independent Observer*, 26 Feb 70.

⁴⁴ (U) Corps of Engineers, U.S. Army Engineer District, Omaha, Nebraska, *U.S. Army Safeguard System Command Community Impact Report, Malmstrom Deployment Area*, (Omaha, NE, Jul 1970), S17, B134, *MMP*.

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growth, road construction/improvements, housing, school enrollment, and medical needs. The USACE expected the project to bring a peak of 12,095 temporary, defense, and secondary employment to the region in 1971. The report identified Conrad as one of “those communities which are most likely to attract the permanent or operational impact population increases.”⁴⁵ Conrad’s population was 2,767 and the USACE expected the town to grow by 2,845 residents. Since it could not house all these new arrivals the USACE anticipated the communities of Brady, Choteau, Dutton, Power, and Valier to absorb some of the population on a temporary basis.⁴⁶

(U) The influx of new residents to the region would strain the existing housing supply, school capacity, and infrastructure. The impact report noted there was minimal housing available across the entire survey area. The USACE anticipated the 25-30 percent of temporary construction workers would likely provide their own housing in the form of trailers. However, the region needed additional permanent housing for the 2,150 people moving to the area as long-term workers. But there was a silver lining for business-minded residents: this shortage provided the opportunity for \$27.7 million in private investment for new homes.⁴⁷ The surge in population would also increase the school population for area school districts. For example, in 1970 the school enrollment for the region was 30,840, with a capacity of 33,740 across the survey area. This was 2,900 above the 1970 enrollment. However, the USACE anticipated 4,005 additional students in the 1972-1973 term and then decline to 1,874 by the 1975-1976 term. After school districts reached capacity in the 1971-1972 term, they would have to build new buildings to facilitate larger enrollments. The USACE estimated area school districts will spend approximately \$4.3 million to expand school facilities, with a \$1.7 million increase to operational costs to school budgets between 1970-1976.⁴⁸ Finally, while most towns had capacity in their sewage systems to handle new residents, the USACE anticipated Conrad would have to expand its system to facilitate 2,000 additional people.⁴⁹

(U) The report also identified a need for additional medical and emergency services. While the survey reported that the Safeguard impact area had adequate medical facilities to serve the estimated population increase, there was a critical shortage of physicians in the area. The ratio of doctors to people was 1.1/1,000 versus the national average of 1.6/1,000. It recommended a staffing increase at Pondera County Hospital “with due consideration given to

⁴⁵ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “Five Cities Feel ABM Impact,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 16 Aug 70.

⁴⁶ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “Five Cities Feel ABM Impact,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 16 Aug 70; Ralph Pomnichowski, “ABM Impact Area Short of Doctors,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 17 Aug 20.

⁴⁷ (U) Ibid.

⁴⁸ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “Five Cities Feel ABM Impact,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 16 Aug 70; Ralph Pomnichowski, “ABM Impact Area Short of Doctors,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 17 Aug 20; “Fifty-one new families move to Northern Montana; More to come,” *Independent Observer*, 27 Aug 70; “Follow-up briefing conducted on ABM construction impact,” *Independent Observer* 1 Oct 70.

⁴⁹ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “Five Cities Feel ABM Impact,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 16 Aug 70.

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the adequacy within each specialty or technician grouping.”⁵⁰ The additional people moving to the region also required some fire departments to upgrade their facilities and hire additional police officers. The report recommended the city of Conrad hire three new police officers and recruit seven additional volunteer firefighters.⁵¹ Ultimately, the report provided “information to Government officials at all levels concerning the possible economic and social effects communities may experience as a result of the construction and operation of Safeguard anti-ballistic missile facilities” in north central Montana which helped decision-makers guide the region as the Safeguard system was under construction.⁵²

(U) Montana’s state and local leaders were skeptical of the report’s conclusions. While testifying before the Senate Subcommittee on Military Construction on 5 August 1970, Montana Governor Forrest H. Anderson had serious reservations about Safeguard’s impact on north-central Montana. Given the current federal assistance program that matched funds, and assuming a 50 percent rate by taxpayers, “the property owners of north-central Montana will be forced to contribute more than \$8 million” to meet the capital investment needs outlined by the USACE.⁵³ He stated that Montana communities could not provide the necessary improvements before the first workers arrived the following year. Governor Anderson noted that property taxes normally pay for infrastructure improvements like sewage systems and school expansion, but local governments would not see this income until at least one year after the first workers arrive. “I am not saying that the people of north-central Montana are unwilling to meet this demand. I am saying they cannot,” he warned.⁵⁴ Conrad civic leaders concurred with Governor Anderson’s assessment.⁵⁵ Without federal monetary assistance Governor Anderson believed the program would create adverse economic conditions for Montana communities and lower the region’s quality of life.

(U) These state and local concerns urged Montana’s congressional delegation to push for local impact funds. While on a tour of north-central Montana in September 1970, Montana Senator Mike Mansfield made an impromptu speech at the Conrad Moose Lodge where he stated he would do what he could to alleviate the ABM system’s financial burden on north-central Montana residents. He believed the federal government should fund these projects and would

⁵⁰ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, “ABM Impact Area Short of Doctors,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 17 Aug 70.

⁵¹ (U) Ibid.

⁵² (U) Corps of Engineers, *Community Impact Report, Malmstrom Deployment Area*, Pg. 1-1.

⁵³ (U) “Governor Says ABM Will Have Adverse Effect,” *Independent Observer*, 20 Aug 70.

⁵⁴ (U) Ibid.

⁵⁵ (U) “Follow-up Briefing Conducted on ABM Construction Impact,” *Independent Observer*, 1 Oct 70.

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work them into future ABM appropriations.⁵⁶ The following month Senator Mansfield introduced the Military Construction Authorization Bill of 1971 which included upwards of \$8 million to “assist local communities in improvement of expansion of those municipal facilities made necessary by impact of Safeguard ABM construction.”⁵⁷ After Congress passed the legislation in November, ABM-impacted communities could apply for federal funds for a host of infrastructure projects.⁵⁸ As Conrad and other north central Montana communities braced themselves for an influx of new residents, the USACE began construction on Montana’s Safeguard ABM system.

(U) The USACE split the construction of the Montana site into two phases. It began construction on the first phase in the spring of 1970. It awarded the Watson Construction Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Smith-Amelco, a joint venture between the Smith Construction Company and Amelco Corporation out of California the initial construction contracts for the MSR and PAR, respectively.⁵⁹ While each company worked on a different portion of the Safeguard project, the work at each location was similar. Both contracts required the excavation of each radar site and associated power plant, along with the lower-level construction. Unfortunately, construction traffic wreaked havoc on the secondary road system throughout the project area. Early in the construction process Pondera County Commissioner Joe H. Preputin complained of rapidly deteriorating roads and high levels of dust caused by heavy truck traffic throughout the county. He called on the Montana State Highway Patrol to enforce load and speed limits and coordinated with maintenance personnel from the Montana Highway Commission to apply penetrating oil to keep the dust down.⁶⁰ For its part the Bureau of Public Roads awarded almost \$3 million in road construction contracts to build over thirty miles of roads to the Safeguard construction sites. The bulk of this construction occurred in March, April, and May 1970, with additional road projects extending into 1971 and beyond.⁶¹ Phase one

⁵⁶ (U) “Mike says extra costs for ABM should be paid by government,” *Independent Observer*, 10 Sep 70.

⁵⁷ (U) “U.S. Senate to discuss ABM construction impact,” *Independent Observer*, 1 Oct 70.

⁵⁸ (U) “Application for funds explained by local liaison,” *Independent Observer*, 17 Dec 70.

⁵⁹ (U) “Minneapolis firm successful low bidder on ABM work,” *Independent Observer*, 7 May 70; “California companies bid low on PAR construction work,” *Independent Observer*, 21 May 70; “ABM primary phase construction almost completed at both sites,” *Independent Observer*, 15 Apr 71.

⁶⁰ (U) “Road damage causes concern to board,” *Independent Observer*, 23 Jul 70; “Plans underway to control dust on ABM roads,” *Independent Observer*, 20 Aug 70.

⁶¹ (U) “\$1 Million Earmarked for Toole County Road,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 29 Jul 71; “State of Montana: Status of Secondary Roads in the Triangle Area, North of Great Falls, as of September 10, 1971,” 10 Sep 71, S17, B138, F3, *MMP*; “Secondary road contracts to be let by highway,” *Independent Observer*, 20 Jan 72; Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 61.

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construction was complete by May 1971 as the USACE received the first bids on the major construction contract for the remainder of the project.⁶²

(U) Phase two included the construction of the PAR, power plant, the MSR, and Sprint and Spartan missile batteries.⁶³ Unfortunately, it suffered an 11-month delay over workers' wages. In 1968 local unions set higher wage standards in anticipation of Sentinel construction: they wanted double rates for any work over 40 hours, and a per diem of \$12 per day the first year that rose to \$14 per day by year three. During the first phase of construction, contractors accepted these rates, and work began and finished more-or-less on time. However, by the time the USACE received bids for phase two the lowest bid was almost \$24 million over its projected cost. The USACE tried to reign in labor expenditures, but after a series of failed negotiations between the USACE, contractors, and labor unions, the Montana Safeguard site experienced a significant work stoppage. Contractors then negotiated directly with national unions, bypassing locals in Montana, which resulted in lower wage and per diem agreements.⁶⁴ The *Tribune* announced that workers would start work for Peter Kiewit and Sons out of Omaha, Nebraska in early January 1972. However, only four unions agreed to the terms of the contract. Work slipped to February, but the USACE was convinced they had enough workers to begin once weather permitted.⁶⁵ This labor dispute pushed the operational start date into 1976.

(U) Safeguard's Impact on Central Montana

(U) With the Montana Safeguard site under construction, and towns like Conrad expanding its infrastructure to meet the project's anticipated needs, the United States and Soviet Union continued negotiations on Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT). Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara first floated the idea of an ABM treaty to Alexi N. Kosygin, Premier of the Soviet Union, during the Glassboro Summit Conference in 1967. McNamara believed ballistic missile defense could further escalate the arms race between the two nations. Even though Kosygin balked at this suggestion as the two nations worked on the nuclear non-proliferation treaty in 1967 and 1968, they agreed to a series of talks.⁶⁶ According to historian Matthew J. Ambrose, "Both parties saw SALT as one part of a broader effort to reduce Cold War

⁶² (U) "ABM primary phase construction almost completed at both sites," *Independent Observer*, 15 Apr 71; "Status of SAFEGUARD Activities at the Malmstrom Site," 23 Sep 71, S17, B137, F3, *MMP*.

⁶³ (U) "Low ABM Bid \$178.9 Million," *Great Falls Tribune*, 26 Mar 71.

⁶⁴ (U) Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pgs. 61-62, 75-78; Mills, *Cold War in a Cold Land*, Pgs. 230-231.

⁶⁵ (U) Ralph Pomnichowski, "Local Unions to Fill Jobs for ABM Projects Near Conrad," *Great Falls Tribune*, 24 Dec 71.

⁶⁶ (U) Matthew J. Ambrose, *The Control Agenda: A History of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), Pgs. 19-22.

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tensions.”⁶⁷ Given the volatility of the 1960s, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and protests throughout the nation, leaders in both the US and Soviet Union sought to provide stability and shore up their domestic political support.⁶⁸ These talks culminated with President Nixon and Leonid I. Brezhnev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, signing the ABM Treaty during the Moscow Summit on 26 May 1972.⁶⁹ This treaty limited each nation to two ABM sites: one to protect its ICBM missile fields and another to protect its national capitol. With only 10 percent of the Montana site built, and the North Dakota complex almost 80 percent complete, the DoD notified the USACE to suspend all construction activities in Montana the following day.⁷⁰ While this action ushered an era of détente, it came at the expense of Montanans living in the Golden Triangle.

⁶⁷ (U) Ibid, Pg. 23.

⁶⁸ (U) Ibid.

⁶⁹ (U) “Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on The Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty),” <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/101888.htm>, accessed on 30 April 2024. The two parties also signed the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and the U.S.-Soviet Incidents at Sea agreement (INCSEA) at this summit. On SALT I see Ambrose, *The Control Agenda*, Pgs. 25-54. On the INCSEA see David F. Winkler, *Cold War at Sea: High-Seas Confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2000).

⁷⁰ (U) “Contractor Told to End ABM Work,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 May 72; Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 95.

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Image 03: United States President Richard M. Nixon and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid I. Brezhnev sign the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and Strategic Arms Limitation Talks agreement in Moscow on 26 May 1972, SD 9002. (Image courtesy of *The Richard Nixon Library & Museum*)

(U) By the early 1970s, Montana's economy, like the rest of the United States, was on the decline.⁷¹ Across the state, the concentration of barley, wheat, and beef commodities since World War II intensified the effects of boom-and-bust cycles on Montana's agricultural economy. While exceptional rainfall coincided with large grain sales to the Soviet Union in the mid-1970s, by the 1980s the bust cycle returned with commodity prices plummeting, land value declining.⁷² Mining, a staple of the state's economy since the early days of Montana Territory, was on the decline too. Throughout the 1970s the Anaconda Company's business in Montana suffered a major setback after Chile nationalized Anaconda's mines, which led to net loss of \$357.3 million dollars in 1971. This led to dramatic cost cutting measures at its mines in Montana, Arizona, and Nevada. By 1974 Anaconda announced the termination of 1,000 jobs in Anaconda and Butte. Atlantic Richfield bought Anaconda Copper in 1977 and shut down its

⁷¹ (U) On the United States' economy in the 1970 see Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, (New York: The New Press, 2010); Meg Jacobs, *Panic and the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2017); Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, (New York: The Free Press, 2001), Pgs. 131-140.

⁷² (U) Michael P. Malone, Richard B. Roeder, and William L. Lang, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, Rev. Ed. (Seattle: The University of Washington Press, 1991), Pgs. 320-322.

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smelting operations in Great Falls in 1980 costing the city 1,500 jobs.⁷³ In 1970 the High Line's per capita income fell to 12 percent below the national average. The state's unemployment rate was up 17.2 percent in 1972 from the previous year, which meant unemployed ABM workers competed with other people who were out of work for the state's meager unemployment benefits.⁷⁴ While the DoD's stoppage of the ABM project coincided with the state's relative sturdy economy in the early 1970s, the removal of the project's funds and the anticipated economic stability it promised disappeared as the state entered the 1980s. The economic effect of the ABM stoppage rippled across Montana.

(U) Area residents held a wide array of responses to the DoD cancelling the project. In Conrad, people's reactions ranged from pleased; rancher Robert Krupp believed "if the cancellation was done in the interests of peace, it's not a bad thing"; to worried, Arnet Smedsrud and Arnold Lightner, owners of a recently developed mobile home court were concerned if they would meet their loan payments with all the workers leaving; to humorous, Mayor Arnot wore a sign around his neck that said, "Don't ever mention ABM in my presence again."⁷⁵ For its part, representatives of Peter Kiewit and Sons halted construction and reduced expenses at the ABM site until it received further instructions from the USACE. Luckily for its supervisory personnel the construction firm could relocate these people to other projects. However, it would lay off everyone it hired locally.⁷⁶ Local workers like Charles Ferguson complained that that he had "four kids to feed. I tried giving them a plateful of political promises and they wouldn't go down."⁷⁷ *Tribune* journalist Mike Wenninger was flabbergasted by the news. For him, the project's cancellation was a waste of time, money, and resources. "Never before in the history of Montana have so many done so much for — nothing," he lamented.⁷⁸

⁷³ (U) Michael P. Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile* (Helena: America & World Geographic Publishing, 1996), Pgs. 33, 60; Malone, et al, *Montana*, Pgs. 323-328. See also Brian James Leech, *The City that Ate Itself: Butte, Montana and its Expanding Berkeley Pit* (Reno: The University of Nevada Press, 2018).

⁷⁴ (U) "Unemployment Casts Gloom on Manpower Panel," *Great Falls Tribune*, 10 May 72; "Job Hunt Focuses on ABM Sites," *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 May 72; "ABM Halt to Cost 3,000 Construction Jobs," *Great Falls Tribune*, 29 May 72; Malone, *Montana: A Contemporary Profile*, Pg. 60.

⁷⁵ (U) James Stokes, "ABM: Withdrawal More Painful Than Habit," *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 May 72.

⁷⁶ (U) "Montanans Stunned by End to Conrad ABM," *Great Falls Tribune*, 27 May 72; "Contractor Told to End ABM Work," *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 May 72.

⁷⁷ (U) Lois Murray, "Bitter ABM Workers Leaving to Look for New Jobs," *Great Falls Tribune*, 4 Jun 72.

⁷⁸ (U) Mike Wenninger, "State's ABM Boom Bursts," *Great Falls Tribune*, 27 May 72.

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(U) Following the cessation of work at the Safeguard sites, the USACE contracting office began unwinding the construction project. On 28 May 1972, it issued delay of work notices to about 20 contractors.⁷⁹ The next month it held a meeting on Malmstrom AFB to advise contractors that it would terminate all subcontracts and purchase orders effective 26 June, and that all settlement proposals with the federal government should consider “work done, changes, suspension, termination, and claims, if any.”⁸⁰ On 5 October the USACE formally terminated its Safeguard construction contracts.⁸¹ All contractors had to maintain security at their respective project sites, and area engineer Colonel Dezarn remained behind with a small contingent of USACE personnel at its Conrad office until it dismantled the sites and completed the final disposition.⁸²

(U) On 11 September 1973, The USACE awarded contracts to cleanup and restore the ABM construction sites. William Clairmont, Inc. of Bismark, North Dakota won the contract for the MSR site, and Peter Kiewit Sons and Associates won the contract for the PAR and missile batteries.⁸³ According to USACE historian James H. Kitchens, “Over the next six months these firms cut away protruding reinforcing steel, bundled it, and shipped it out for scrap salvage.” He continued, “The same treatment was given to wiring, piping, fencing, light poles, and other salvageable fixtures.”⁸⁴ Contractors also ripped out roads, parking lots, curbs, gutters, trailer sites, wastewater ponds, and filled in the Spartan and Sprint launch facilities. Federal agencies took away the most useful items, such as office equipment, vehicles, etc., but the USACE disposed of the excess at Malmstrom AFB. It also transferred piles of road aggregate to Pondera County. In the last step of the reclamation process contractors spread topsoil over the Safeguard ruins, graded the sites, and seeded them with grass. By July 1974, the process was complete; only the unfinished first level of the PAR remained above ground and visible.⁸⁵

(U) In response to Montana’s congressional delegation Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird asked the President’s Inter-Agency Economic Adjustment Committee (IAEAC) to visit north central Montana and “assess the nature of the impact and institute a broad-gauge economic

⁷⁹ (U) “Contractor Told to End ABM Work,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 May 72; Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 96.

⁸⁰ (U) Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 97.

⁸¹ (U) “ABM contracts terminate,” *Independent Observer*, 5 Oct 72; Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 97.

⁸² (U) “Corps of Engineers to stay until ABM site dismantled,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 5 Oct 72.

⁸³ (U) “Peter Kiewit Sons Co. gets low bid for restoration of PAR site,” *Independent Observer*, 13 Sep 73; Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pgs. 97, 100.

⁸⁴ (U) Kitchens, *A History of the Huntsville Division*, Pg. 97.

⁸⁵ (U) *Ibid*, Pgs. 97, 100.

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recovery program for the affected workers and communities.”⁸⁶ Led by William J. Sheehan, Director, Office of Economic Adjustment, DoD, the Committee visited the ABM construction sites on the morning of 8 June 1972 before meeting with residents, workers, business owners, and local officials at the Meadowlark School in Conrad that afternoon. These workshops were listening sessions where the committee heard from residents about how the ABM’s stoppage affected business, agriculture, education, the labor force, and community development throughout Pondera County. It held similar workshops in Shelby and Chester the following day before meeting with Montana’s congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. on the 10th.⁸⁷

(U) The IAEAC, however, was at odds with state and local officials over priorities. The Committee emphasized it was in Montana to help Conrad diversify its industrial base. Sheehan stressed that the DoD would complete the projects currently underway, but “real economic recovery must come from the community and private investment, with task force ‘door opening.’” He continued, “it is not part of the team’s job to bring in businesses but that it can help show the way for such a move...This group helps communities to help themselves. Our major thrust is diversification.”⁸⁸ Residents, however, wanted immediate relief. Local business and civic leaders requested emergency loans to stave off bankruptcy. For example, at the workshop with the Small Business Administration, Steve Henderson, president of Farmers State Bank, said the interaction with committee members “was like talking to people who are hungry now about next year’s crop.” “The people who attended,” he continued, “were there to seek redress from the government for independent business losses they had sustained from the ABM pullout.”⁸⁹ Small business owners like Smedsrud and Lightner needed assistance meeting their loan payments since most of the ABM workers left the region.⁹⁰ The Conrad City Council and Pondera County Commissioners, alongside the Conrad Chamber of Commerce, Pondera Action Council, and Kiwanis Club recommended that the federal government make a “low interest, long

⁸⁶ (U) The Office of Economic Adjustment, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Installations & Logistics), “Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana,” Nov 72, Pg. 1, S17, N137, F2, *MMP*.

⁸⁷ (U) “Task Force To Study ABM Pullout Effect,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 7 Jun 72; “Task force meeting today to discuss ABM pullout,” *Independent Observer*, 8 Jun 72; James Stokes, “Conrad-Task Force Standoff,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 Jun 72; “Conrad-Task Force Meet Ends With ‘Resolutions,’” 10 Jun 72; Carla W. Beck, “ABM Task Force Obeisant to Mike,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72; James Stokes, “Federal Team: ‘We Did a Lot,’” *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72.

⁸⁸ (U) James Stokes, “Conrad-Task Force Standoff,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 Jun 72. See also The Office of Economic Adjustment, “Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana,” Pgs. 4-6.

⁸⁹ (U) “Businessmen express emotions at workshops,” *Independent Observer*, 15 Jun 72.

⁹⁰ (U) James Stokes, “ABM: Withdrawal More Painful Than Habit,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 May 72.

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term loan program available in order that these individuals may...be able to recover their investments, at least in part.”⁹¹

(U) Workers also demanded some sort of financial assistance from the federal government. Unfortunately for area workers, the state’s unemployment insurance coffers were empty. On 27 May 1972, Montana’s Temporary Compensation Program for out of work residents ended on the same day the DoD halted ABM construction. When the state’s unemployment rate fell .10 percent below the 6.5 percent needed to keep it active, a statistic made possible by the influx of ABM-related workers, the program ended. This situation created major challenges for workers on the Safeguard project. For example, Ronald Montgomery, a draftsman, tried to gain employment with the ABM project for a year. Within six months of reporting to his job with Peter Kiewit Sons and Associates in Conrad, Montgomery learned he was out of work. He filed for unemployment on 6 June 1972 but had to wait for a determination along with hundreds of others.⁹² Fred Barret, the state Employment Security Division administrator, noted the irony: “It is ironic...that the very workers whose jobs were a factor in reducing the unemployment rate now find themselves in the unemployment line.”⁹³ Between May and June 1972 Pondera County’s unemployment rate increased from 5.6 percent to 10.2 percent.⁹⁴

(U) With Montana’s unemployment insurance on unstable footing, state and federal officials sought funds to relocate unemployed ABM workers to jobs elsewhere. Montana’s Manpower Advisory Council recommended Governor Anderson request funds from the Department of Labor to “help stranded missile-program laborers go elsewhere for work.”⁹⁵ For his part Montana Senator Lee Metcalf called on the upper chamber to authorize a “labor mobility fund, administered by the State Employment Office...to get these workmen...to where there are jobs.”⁹⁶ Within a month \$250,000 in federal funds flowed to the state of Montana for worker relocation. Approximately 600 people took advantage of this program and moved from Montana

⁹¹ (U) “Service organizations present Position Paper,” *Independent Observer*, 22 Jun 72; See also The Office of Economic Adjustment, “Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana,” Pgs. 4-6.

⁹² (U) Montgomery to Mansfield, letter, undated, S17, B208, F1, *MMP*; “300 Idled ABM Workers File Jobless Claims, Others Still Hopeful,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 15 Jun 72; “Unemployment: 8.4 Per Cent,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 13 Jul 72.

⁹³ (U) “ABM Jobs Figure in Aid Cutoff,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 Jun 72.

⁹⁴ (U) The Office of Economic Adjustment, “Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana,” Pg. 20.

⁹⁵ (U) J.D. Holmes, “State Seeking \$100,00 to ‘Unwind’ ABM Project,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 31 May 72.

⁹⁶ (U) “Metcalf concerned about effects of ABM closure,” *Independent Observer*, 1 Jun 72.

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to Alaska, Indiana, Arizona, and Nevada for work.⁹⁷ For those that decided to stay, Senator Mansfield and state officials urged the federal government to release \$19 million in highway contracts. This would, in theory, address individual workers' financial concerns by providing employment in the near term. Mansfield reminded committee members that "Montana people didn't ask for Safeguard. They accommodated it. They raised no objections... Due to the unique circumstances of the ABM suspension, they are entitled to every consideration in word as well as deed."⁹⁸ The TF took these meetings under advisement and would present its first report within 30 days.⁹⁹

(U) The IAEAC delivered its report to Montana's congressional delegation in June. It identified 44 specific actions requested by state, county, and local officials to ease the impact of the ABM work stoppage on the region.¹⁰⁰ By October 1972 over half were approved or in progress. For example, the Department of Housing and Urban Development authorized over \$1.1 million for the development of Horizon Lodge, an affordable housing development for senior citizens in Conrad. For its part the Small Business Administration provided a \$685,000 lease guarantee to the newly built Village Shopping Center, which the Committee estimated would generate approximately 50 jobs. A combination of Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and Safeguard Community Impact funds financed school construction in Conrad.¹⁰¹ While the federal Economic Development Administration also identified Cascade, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, and Toole counties as redevelopment areas based on the ABM stoppage and "anticipated substantial and persistent unemployment."¹⁰² This made it possible for the it to provide monies for technical assistance, public works projects, grants, and business loans. With

⁹⁷ (U) "State Agency Facilities Relocate ABM Workers," *Great Falls Tribune*, 3 Jul 72; "More Funds Available to Move ABM Workers," *Great Falls Tribune*, 4 Jul 72; "Some recent encouragement for area's economic situation," *Independent Observer*, 6 Jul 72; "500 ABM workers to be relocated," *Independent Observer*, 20 Jul 72.

⁹⁸ (U) Carla W. Beck, "ABM Task Force Obeisant to Mike," *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72.

⁹⁹ (U) James Stokes, "Conrad-Task Force Standoff," *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 Jun 72; "Conrad-Task Force Meet Ends With 'Resolutions,'" 10 Jun 72; Carla W. Beck, "ABM Task Force Obeisant to Mike," *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72; James Stokes, "Federal Team: 'We Did a Lot,'" *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72; James Stokes, "Federal Team: 'We Did a Lot,'" *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72; "Businessmen express emotions at workshops," *Independent Observer*, 15 Jun 72; "Service organizations present position paper," *Independent Observer*, 15 Jun 72; "Results of 2-day Task Force meet look dim for investors," *Independent Observer*, 15 Jun 72; "Service organizations present Position Paper," *Independent Observer*, 22 Jun 72.

¹⁰⁰ (U) James Stokes, "ABM Task Force Reports," *Great Falls Tribune*, 26 Jun 72.

¹⁰¹ (U) "Task Force releases data on ABM affected projects," *Independent Observer*, 14 Sep 72; The Office of Economic Adjustment, "Status Report on The Economic Adjustment Program in North Central Montana," Pgs. 13, 25, 31.

¹⁰² (U) "ABM Counties Gain Redevelopment Tag," *Great Falls Tribune*, 8 Jul 72.

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federal assistance in progress, Pondera County residents came together to create an organization that would guide redevelopment projects in the region.

(U) Despite earlier protests, Conrad residents eventually embraced IAEAC's call for industrial development. At a 27 June 1972 public meeting, area business and community leaders created a non-profit economic development corporation to effectively use ABM federal aid. John Larson, president of Conrad Chamber of Commerce, believed "there was a need in the community for a joint effort to overcome the results of the ABM pullout" and hoped this corporation would "formulate constructive ideas that would involve the whole community."¹⁰³ Attendees believed it was important for residents to identify what type of community Conrad wanted to be going forward. Most agreed that Conrad should maintain its agricultural base because "Farming is the heart and guts of our economic life."¹⁰⁴ But others wanted to entice some form of manufacturing to the region to avoid the boom-and-bust economy with an emphasis on "sustained economic growth."¹⁰⁵ Coupled with recently completed ABM impact construction projects such as Conrad's sewer expansion, school construction, and recreation facilities throughout the county, Mayor Arnot believed the city could absorb upwards of 7,000 residents. If Pondera County's citizens did not harness the ABM fallout funds, they could watch its best and brightest leave town for economic opportunities elsewhere.¹⁰⁶

(U) The Economic Development Corporation of Pondera County (EDCPC) identified the MSR facilities nine miles east of Conrad as a possible industrial park. The site consisted of an office building, warehouse, carpenter shop, and liner plate shop which totaled 73,000 square feet and sat upon 300 acres of land.¹⁰⁷ The EDCPC believed this location was ideal for light industry and recruited numerous industries and organizations to the industrial park. Early in the planning process it met with several businesses, including a steel reclamation company that produced re-bar for the construction industry.¹⁰⁸ Later it tried to recruit an Army National Guard unit from Shelby and the McLaughlin Research Institute for Biomedical Sciences from Great Falls with no

¹⁰³ (U) "Corporation planned to help boost local economy," *Independent Observer*, 22 Jun 72.

¹⁰⁴ (U) "Corporation formed to seek new industry for area," *Independent Observer*, 29 Jun 72.

¹⁰⁵ (U) "Corporation planned to help boost local economy," *Independent Observer*, 22 Jun 72.

¹⁰⁶ (U) "Corporation formed to seek new industry for area," *Independent Observer*, 29 Jun 72; "Development Corporation selects Board of Directors," *Independent Observer*, 13 Jul 72; "EDC elects officers; views proposals for development," *Independent Observer*, 27 Jul 72.

¹⁰⁷ (U) "County, EDC make offer to buy MSR site," *Independent Observer*, 8 May 75.

¹⁰⁸ (U) "EDC seeking re-cycling firm for industrial purposes," *Independent Observer*, 4 Oct 73; Ralph Pomnichowski, "Unused ABM site may be become steel reclamation plant," *Great Falls Tribune*, 14 Dec 73.

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success.¹⁰⁹ After Pondera County purchased the MSR site in October 1975 for \$150,000, the EDC successfully recruited the Cascade Coach Company, which made pickup truck campers and recreational vehicles; Intercontinental Truck Body, a Canadian firm; American Mud and Petro-Chem, a petrochemical company; and AVCO, an aerospace corporation that made electrical harnesses for Lockheed's L-1011 Tristar passenger airplane, to the Pondera Industrial Park-East.¹¹⁰

(U) By 1994 EDCPC divested itself of the industrial park. It sold the former liner plate shop to Intercontinental Truck Body, and after AVCO left the former office building, EDCPC sold the facility to M-K Distributors who manufactured agricultural, truck, and recreation products. Across its nearly 20-year lifespan, this economic development project helped stabilize Conrad's economy through industrial growth.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ (U) "Local EDC working hard to bring guard unit here," *Independent Observer*, 13 May 82; Buck Traxler, "Conrad bids to relocate McLaughlin Institute," *Independent Observer*, 17 May 90.

¹¹⁰ (U) "EDC assured priority for purchase of MSR buildings," *Independent Observer*, 20 Sep 73; "County, EDC make offer to buy MSR site," *Independent Observer*, 8 May 75; "EDC officially buys MSR site," *Independent Observer*, 9 Oct 75; Ralph Bidwell, "AVCO at Conrad makes electrical harnesses to go in L-1011 wings," *Independent Observer*, 24 Jan 80; "Chemical supplier for oil well drilling, testing locates here," *Independent Observer*, 12 Feb 81.

¹¹¹ (U) "What is EDC?," *Independent Observer*, 1 Jan 98.

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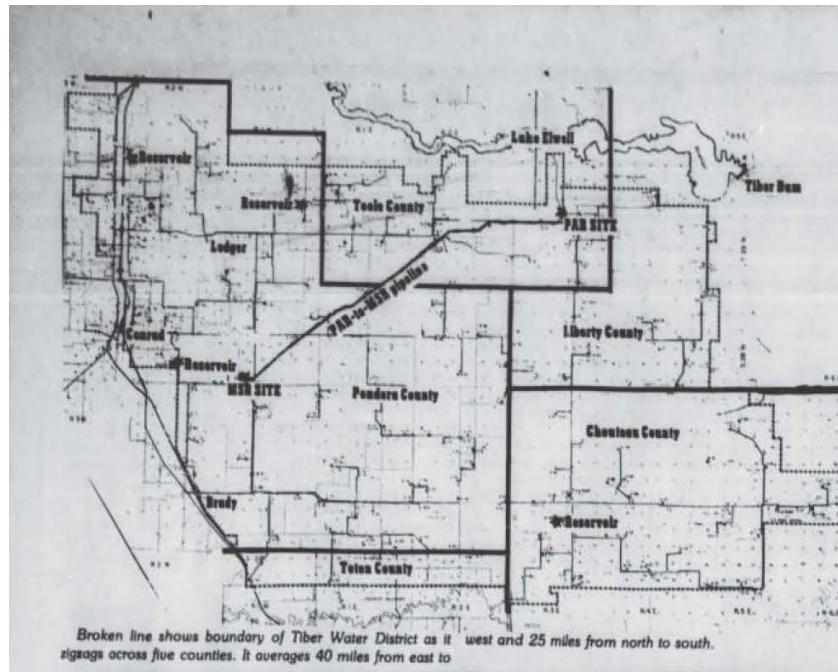


Image 04: Map of the Tiber Water District, “Tiber Water District saves 280 users from hauling 100 million gallons a year,” *Independent Observer*, 1 July 1982, SD 9003.

(U) In the summer of 1972, the IAEAC assisted elected officials to convert the 26-mile water pipeline from the Tiber Reservoir to ABM sites for civilian use. Montana Congressman Dick Shoup worked with the DoD to turn over the pipeline to locals, which conveyed water to farms, ranches, and homes in Choteau, Liberty, Pondera, Teton, and Toole counties.¹¹² This area contained no wells and landowners had to haul water to their property. The Tiber water district supplied water to an area “from the Marias River south to the Teton River with the western border being Interstate 15 and the eastern edge being on a line south from Chester.”¹¹³ After a series of public meetings, the ABM Rural Domestic Water Development Committee (RDWDC) hired the engineering firm of Hurlbut, Kersich, and McCullough (HKM) from Billings to prepare a “preliminary design and cost analysis of the proposed water distribution system.”¹¹⁴ By January 1973 Congressman Shoup announced the DoD approved the pipeline for non-military use.¹¹⁵ On 6 March 1973, area residents approved the formation of the Tiber County Water District (TCWD) in a 445-168 vote. This action also permitted the district to sell bonds to cover

¹¹² (U) Carla W. Beck, “ABM Task Force Obeisant to Mike,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Jun 72; “Million Gallon ABM Water Line Available,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 29 Jul 72; “Backs Water District,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 20 Aug 72.

¹¹³ (U) “Engineering firm to make study for water users,” *Independent Observer*, 30 Nov 72.

¹¹⁴ (U) “ABM Pipeline Subject of Two Meetings,” *Independent Observer*, 12 Oct 72; “Engineering firm to make study for water users,” *Independent Observer*, 30 Nov 72.

¹¹⁵ (U) “Non-military ABM facility use approved,” *Independent Observer*, 25 Jan 73.

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the cost of planning and construction and elected a five-member board of directors.¹¹⁶ If successful, Pondera County Commissioner Robert Emrick believed this project would be “almost as significant as rural electrification.”¹¹⁷

(U) With the Tiber Water User’s Association now active construction could begin. Following a feasibility study, engineering firm HKM estimated the preliminary cost for the system was approximately \$3,427,700 for 450 miles of water distribution lines to about 270 farms.¹¹⁸ Payment for this project came from two primary sources. The Senate Armed Services Committee approved \$1.5 million—approximately 50 percent of the project’s cost—to convert the ABM water line into civilian use. The TCWD paid the other half.¹¹⁹ The TCWD issued questionnaires to prospective users to determine anticipated water needs.¹²⁰ Users’ service rates would cover the district’s portion of the construction cost.¹²¹ In February 1975, the TCWD awarded a construction contract to Peter Kiewitt Sons, Co., out of Billings and Swank Enterprises in Valier to build the water distribution lines and supporting facilities.¹²² On 11 April 1975, the TCWD held its groundbreaking ceremony for its irrigation system at the Ledger Community Hall approximately 13 miles northeast of Conrad.¹²³ By October 1976, farmers began receiving water from the TCWD.¹²⁴ Vade V. Hamma, a TCWD director and farmer in Choteau County, was very pleased with the system: “Now we always have a cistern full...And it’s darn good water.”¹²⁵

¹¹⁶ (U) “Voters approve formation of water district; elect board,” *Independent Observer*, 14 Mar 73.

¹¹⁷ (U) Jim Stokes, “Conrad: Glowing Promises Fade in Washington,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 28 Aug 72.

¹¹⁸ (U) “Tiber Users plan ABM waterline study,” *Independent Observer*, 27 Sep 73; “Tiber Water User’s proposed project to include 5 counties,” *Independent Observer*, 18 Oct 73.

¹¹⁹ (U) “Tiber water line gets nod,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 13 Sep 73.

¹²⁰ (U) “Tiber Water Users outline proposed services,” *Independent Observer*, 25 Oct 73; “Water Users ask for questionnaires,” *Independent Observer*, 27 Dec 73.

¹²¹ (U) “Tiber Water Users set rates for hook-up and services,” *Independent Observer*, 8 Nov 73.

¹²² (U) “Tiber Water District awards contracts,” *Independent Observer*, 13 Feb 75.

¹²³ (U) “Water haul ending for 270 farm families,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 12 Apr 75; “Dedication ceremonies held for Tiber Water District line,” *Independent Observer*, 17 Apr 75.

¹²⁴ (U) “Ledger Shorts,” *Independent Observer*, 28 Oct 76.

¹²⁵ (U) Ralph Bidwell, “Tiber Water District saves 280 users from hauling 100 million gallons a year,” *Independent Observer*, 1 Jul 82.

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(U) By 1977 observers believed that Pondera County and the rest of north central Montana recovered from the ABM pullout. In a weeklong tour of the area in October 1975 Governor Thomas L. Judge visited the seven counties affected by the ABM stoppage. He was impressed by this economic recovery and called it “unbelievable, exciting, impressive, beautiful.”¹²⁶ During the summer of 1976 the city of Conrad experienced an influx of Boeing employees associated with the Minuteman III ICBM force modernization project in the 564th Missile Squadron’s missile fields surrounding Conrad. These workers and their families strained Conrad’s housing inventory and school capacity.¹²⁷ However, this correlated to an increase of retail spending throughout Pondera County in 1977; almost double the previous year. Personal income also increased by more than seven thousand dollars since 1972.¹²⁸ The following year the City-County Planning Board’s Comprehensive Planning Program estimated that Conrad’s population would be 7,442 by 2000. It pointed to Conrad’s water and sewer system expansion during the short-lived ABM program as factors that informed this estimate.¹²⁹ In a 1977 report, Art Shaw, the interim director of the Golden Triangle Area Development Corporation credited the EDA with helping Conrad weather the ABM pullout. “The economy of...Conrad appears to have reached pre-ABM levels or better,” he said.¹³⁰

(U) Conclusion

(U) Today the Safeguard ABM site near Ledger stands a relic of Montana’s Cold War past. When the DoD announced that an ABM system would come to north central Montana in 1968, local leaders and area residents supported the project—albeit with some reservations. Soon federal dollars flowed into the region. The town of Conrad received a steady stream of area impact funds to mitigate the impact of military construction. This took the form of sewer system expansion, school construction, and road maintenance. The rest came via workers’ wages; area residents either created new business or expanded existing ones to meet people’s needs for housing, leisure, etc. However, as part of the ABM Treaty the United States agreed to terminate construction on the Montana Safeguard site in 1972. Almost as quickly as federal funds flooded the area, they receded, leaving north-central Montana residents in the lurch. In response the federal government spent millions of dollars on impact fund projects to stabilize Conrad’s economy. While many area workers and businesses felt an immediate economic impact the

¹²⁶ (U) Carla Beck, “Northcentral, Hi-Line economic development impresses governor,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 26 Oct 75.

¹²⁷ (U) “Housing shortage in Conrad critical,” *Independent Observer*, 19 Aug 76; David Stumpf, *Minuteman: A Technical History of the Missile that Defined American Nuclear Warfare* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2020), Pgs. 385-394.

¹²⁸ (U) “Pondera County economy on upswing,” *Independent Observer*, 6 Jan 77.

¹²⁹ (U) “City-County Planners told Conrad area population to be 7,442 by year 2000,” *Independent Observer*, Aug 31 78.

¹³⁰ (U) “Conrad and Shelby have fully recovered from ABM pullout,” *Great Falls Tribune*, 11 Sep 77.

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IAEAC's efforts to encourage small scale industrial development and bolster the region's agricultural base helped stabilize the economy over the long term.

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