

Quarterly Update | Summer Edition 2025

Creating A Safer Montana Through Accountability, Rehabilitation & Empowerment

Governor Greg Gianforte Tours Riverside



In August, Gov. Greg Gianforte toured the Riverside facility in Boulder. The facility was repurposed in May to house 50 female inmates and shrink the backlog of women sitting in county jails. Using the dollars from the Future of Corrections Fund, the DOC plans to renovate buildings at Riverside to accommodate another 50-60 beds.



A second chance: DOC offender completes college courses for brighter future

Former Montana Women’s Prison inmate Susan Czapiewski wanted to help others like herself who struggle with alcohol addiction. So, when she saw she could take classes at MWP through Dawson Community College, she took a chance and applied for the program. In December 2024, Czapiewski graduated with her associate’s degree in Chemical Dependency Counseling and is on her way to becoming a licensed addiction counselor.

Czapiewski said she was up for the challenge of a college course load.

“I’ve been through a lot of programming and treatment, and I’ve come through the other side, and I’m in recovery now,” she said. “I think that an alcoholic addict working with another alcoholic addict is more acceptable to somebody in that position because I can relate. It’s not like I’m just book smart. I’ve been there, done that, and have worked through the recovery programs.”

While at MWP, Czapiewski completed her coursework through the Prison Education Program, formerly known as the Second Chance Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are a form of federal financial aid available to students with financial need, previously unavailable to incarcerated students. With the expansion of the program, the U.S.



Susan Czapiewski, who is currently under DOC supervision, graduated with her associate’s degree in Chemical Dependency Counseling from Dawson Community College in December 2024. Czapiewski completed her degree while at the Montana Women’s Prison with Pell grants through the Prison Education Program.

Department of Education selected Helena College, Great Falls College, Montana State University Billings, and Dawson Community College to provide postsecondary instruction to incarcerated students through the DOC.

“I cannot say how wonderful it was to visit with Susan and congratulate her on the completion of her A.A. in Chemical Dependency Counseling,” DOC Education Bureau Chief Travis Anderson said. “Her dedication to her studies was only surpassed by her insistence on making a positive impact to help others. The Education Services Bureau staff and Dawson Community College faculty are so happy for Susan

and wish her the best of luck as she continues forward with her work toward Licensed Addiction Counseling licensure.”

Currently, Czapiewski is under DOC supervision in the community and is looking for an internship. She needs to complete 1,000 hours in an internship before she can become a licensed addiction counselor.

“I’d like to be able to help others help themselves,” she said. “It’s a long journey in recovery. The only thing I did right was that I kept coming back, and I didn’t die out there. It’s a deadly disease, and I’d like to help people face their fears and challenges, so they don’t go back out there and use.”



First residents move into state employee workforce housing in Deer Lodge; DOC celebrates opportunity for Montana State Prison employees



MSP Correctional Officer Stephanie Erb (center) accepts the keys to her new townhouse in state workforce housing from DOC Director Brian Gootkin (left) and Rep. John Fitzpatrick (right).

The first residents of Pintler Meadows, state employee workforce housing in Deer Lodge, received the keys to their new townhouses in August.

Kenneth and Stephanie Erb, both correctional officers at Montana State Prison, were excited to exchange the camper they have been living in for seven months since moving to Montana from Florida for their new accommodations.

“The department has been so welcoming and made us feel like we belong here from the start,” Stephanie Erb said. “Moving into the townhome still feels like a dream and I will forever be grateful to the state of Montana and the Montana Department of Corrections to have made this possible.”

Montana legislators allocated funding in the 2023 session through the Montana Community Reinvestment Plan Act to “begin to address housing needs and offer a regional, community-based solution

to creating affordable, attainable workforce housing infrastructure in the state.”

The Montana Board of Investments is overseeing the construction of the Pintler Meadows property which is located within a 30-mile radius of MSP and Montana State Hospital. Seventy percent of the 28 units will be used for MSP employees and 30% for Montana State Hospital employees.

“The availability of affordable housing for employees at MSP, our largest secure facility, has been a struggle for the DOC in terms of recruitment and retention,” said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. “We appreciate this investment by Governor Gianforte and Montana legislators in the folks who perform these critical jobs. The looks on these people’s faces when they received their keys was priceless.”

State workers who qualify for housing in Pintler Meadows must have a household income of less than \$110,000; will spend no more than 30% of their monthly household income on housing if awarded; or are currently unhoused. Occupants were selected earlier this year through a lottery.

The additional bonus is that tenants who continue employment with Montana State Prison until the end of their five-year lease will be eligible for downpayment assistance toward the purchase of a new home. The source of the downpayment is their rent paid throughout their tenancy at Pintler Meadows.

For more information, visit investmentmt.com/workforce-housing.

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~MSP Correctional Officer Stephanie Erb



Construction projects underway at Montana State Prison

Montana State Prison Warden Jim Salmonsén has worked at the Montana Department of Corrections for more than 25 years, and he’s excited to see the construction that’s taking place at MSP this summer for the new low-side housing units.

“This is going to be a benefit not only for the inmates, but for our employees as well,” Salmonsén said. “Inmates will be safer in their units, and staff members will be safer doing their jobs. It’s going to be great over the next several years to see the buildings go up.”

In 2023, Gov. Gianforte signed into law House Bill 817, carried by Rep. John Fitzpatrick, R-Anaconda. House Bill 817 allocated a historic \$156 million investment to expedite the construction of



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27 years later: John Daugherty rides off into retirement



DOC Director Brian Gootkin (left) presents a retirement plaque to John Daugherty during his retirement party in July.

In July, Montana Department of Corrections’ Central Services Chief John Daugherty retired after a 27-year career with the department. During his time with the DOC, Daugherty held a variety of roles in the IT department and Central Services Division, and was even the interim deputy director.

A retirement party was held at the Central Office in Helena that included current staff, former staff members, and guests Daugherty worked with over the years.

“Thank you for decades of service not only to the state of Montana but also your loyalty to the Department of Corrections,” Director Brian

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WRAP: Helping inmates help themselves and their peers

Helping inmates leave prison with the tools to be successful is a top priority for the Montana Department of Corrections. Just as important, however, is teaching them to help themselves and each other behind the prison walls.

Earlier this year, the members of the DOC’s Citizen Ambassadors 4 Change (CAC) group and DOC staff members, started bringing the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) program to interested inmates at Montana State Prison and Montana Women’s Prison (Riverside).

“WRAP is a program that teaches

people how to manage difficult emotions and behaviors by helping them recognize their unique triggers,” said Coleman Mack, the DOC’s Mental Health Services manager. “Then, we ask program participants to develop a crisis plan for themselves using tools, like exercise or talking it out with a friend, to move themselves past that crisis.”

To date, 90 inmates at MSP and Riverside have participated in the class and the response has been overwhelmingly positive, according to Renee Seiller-McDaniel, who co-coordinates the WRAP program.

“I had a participant approach me after receiving the training to let me know he had already put his crisis plan to use,” she said. “He said he recognized his trigger, and rather than respond negatively, he was able to use the tools he learned in class to turn it around.”

According to Seiller-McDaniel, some of the class participants were so inspired by the program that they started their own informal groups at the facility to offer each other support in the daily prison setting. Others are interested in being trained to become WRAP facilitators so they can provide one-on-one

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DOC facility wins Center for Improving Youth Justice award

The Center for Improving Youth Justice (CIYJ) honored Pine Hills Correctional Facility in June as a 2025 Barbara Allen-Hagen Award winner for its commitment to treating youth residents and using the Performance-based Standards (PbS) model to achieve positive outcomes.

“Working with juvenile offenders can be an extremely difficult job, but everyone at Pine Hills, from correctional officers to teachers, care deeply about making a

positive impact on these young people,” Montana Department of Corrections Director Brian Gootkin said. “This award shines a light on the great work of Warden Steve Ray and his staff for their effort to create a safe environment for residents and staff members.”

The Barbara Allen-Hagen award is given annually to a correctional program that best exemplifies the commitment of the CIYJ to “treat all young people as one of our own and

use the continuous improvement model to achieve positive outcomes for young people, staff, and families.” Pine Hills has worked with CIYJ since 2012.

“*This award shines a light on the great work of Warden Steve Ray and his staff for their effort to create a safe environment for residents and staff members.*”
~DOC Director Brian Gootkin

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Pine Hills Correctional Facility staff members posed for a photo in recognition of their Barbara Allen-Hagen Award from the Center for Improving Youth Justice.



Probation and Parole officers graduate from academy



Great Falls Probation and Parole Officer Heidi Visocan looks over a shoulder during scenario practice at the Probation and Parole Academy at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy in Helena.

After seven weeks of classes, 21 DOC Probation and Parole officers graduated from the Montana Law Enforcement Academy in Helena.

This was the 35th Probation and Parole Basic Academy held at MLEA.

“It was a great seven weeks with 20 other students in the class,” Great Falls Officer Heidi Visocan said. “We all just became a family with the time we spent together, and we’re all going to be really close for sure for the rest of our years.”

During the ceremony, seven students were recognized

with class awards.

- Visocan received the Academic Excellence Award.
- Henry Malta received the Inspirational Award.
- Ryan-James Helton received the Defensive Tactics Award.
- Shawn Sylvia received the Firearms Award.
- Christopher Donovan received the Vigilance Award.
- Paeton Ohs and Visocan received the Class Representative Award.

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Comings and Goings

In the Hawaiian language, “aloha” means both hello and good-bye. In July, the DOC said the good-bye kind of aloha to two of our Executive team members, John Daugherty and Natalie Smitham, and the hello kind to Natalia Bowser.

John Daugherty

With 27 years under his belt, John Daugherty, chief executive officer for DOC’s Central Services Division, or the “Godfather” of DOC, relaxed into his well-deserved retirement.

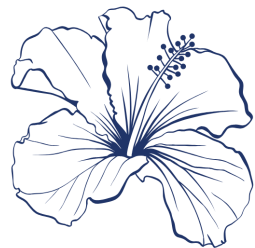
Needless to say, his farewell luau was epic with appearances from former colleagues including Gayle Butler, retired administrator of Montana Correctional Enterprises, and Colleen Ambrose, retired chief counsel.

“Thank you for your years of service, not only to the state of Montana, but for your loyalty to the Department of Corrections and the people of the Department of Corrections,” said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. “You are a wealth of institutional knowledge that cannot be replaced.”

Gootkin also congratulated John on a career that earned him the respect of his peers across the nation, his mentorship of numerous DOC employees, and his tireless commitment to innovation.

Natalie Smitham

DOC Chief Financial Officer Natalie Smitham announced at the end of July that she would be leaving the department to pursue another challenging CFO position at the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.



Natalie had been with the DOC for four years. In that time, she reorganized the DOC’s accounting structure, led the implementation of 340B drug pricing, and used her expertise to guide the department

through two legislative sessions garnering \$701.5 million for new infrastructure and repair projects.

She earned herself the nickname, “The Closer,” for her detailed knowledge of the DOC’s budget and her ability to fully answer questions from legislators, often without the need for follow ups.

“Natalie’s leadership and positive attitude will be deeply missed,” Gootkin said. “DPHHS will be lucky to have her in their court.”

Natalia Bowser

In August, Natalia Bowser joined the DOC as its first Innovations chief, managing the DOC’s new Innovations unit. That unit is comprised of Research, Analytics and Planning, Desistence, Project Management, Security Technology, and SCIR.

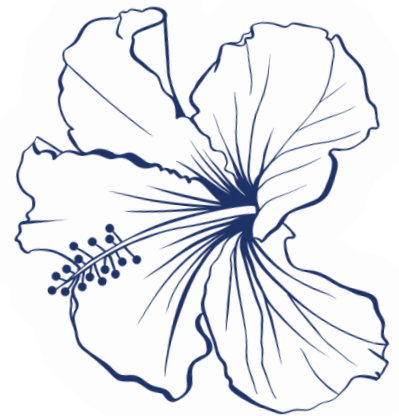
“Natalia’s breadth of experience and her enthusiasm make her the type of leader we were seeking to guide this exciting, new unit,” said Deputy Director Eric Strauss. “This team will be at the forefront as we move forward into the future of corrections in Montana.”

Natalia comes to the DOC from the Montana Board of Crime Control where she served as executive director. Prior to that, she spent 14 years at the Montana Highway Patrol focusing on finance and operations.

“

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~Deputy Director Eric Strauss



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new low-side housing units at the prison. The project, part of a larger \$211 million infrastructure improvement plan, will replace three of the four existing low-security housing buildings with larger, more efficient facilities.

Along with Gov. Gianforte, the DOC broke ground on the project at MSP in April. Since then, Sletten Construction has been working on the low-side buildings. Currently,

the construction crew is completing underground plumbing, waterlines are laid, and the department is evaluating furniture options for the new housing.

The 2025 Montana Legislature also appropriated \$150 million in HB 5 for two more units at Montana State Prison. Along with the housing units, Montana State Prison will see construction of a new high-side programming

building and an addition to the staff administrative building.

“It’s very exciting to see the work completed so far at MSP,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “We still have a ways to go, but you see the vision starting to come together. We’re thankful Gov. Gianforte and the legislature have invested in the DOC and public safety in Montana.”

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Gootkin said. “I wish you and your family all the best in retirement. If anyone deserves it, it’s you. Most importantly I’m happy I can call you my friend and I’ll miss you.”

Daugherty’s lasting legacy will be the implementation of a new offender management system called Compass. This will replace the DOC’s current offender

management system that was created by staff members.



John Daugherty (center) was honored with a retirement party in July at the DOC central office in Helena.



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peer mentoring and even facilitate groups.

“I’d never had a plan in place before that helps before I act out,” said one WRAP participant at MSP. “It helped me become aware of reactions I had before that were holding me back. I had to learn that I was the problem and stop pointing the finger at everyone else.”

To ensure as many inmates as possible can participate in the programming, DOC staff and members of the department’s CAC group have participated in various levels of WRAP training. In September, a group will participate in Level 3 training

which will allow them to “train the trainers” and sustain the program moving forward.

This fall, the team is scheduled to bring WRAP to Montana Women’s Prison in Billings and the Riverside facility in Boulder.

The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services generously provided funding to train DOC staff and members of the CAC in the WRAP program.

Award, Page 6



PHCF received the award for its work over the years in reducing youth confinement. After staff members tracked confinement rates for the PbS data requirements, the facility began evaluating different methods to work with residents during incidents that may compromise the security of the facility or safety of participants. As staff members began to rely more heavily on verbal de-escalation tactics, positive-based reinforcement, and increasing youth incentives and programs, the facility saw a change.

“When a national organization looks at the data and research, sees the resulting safe environment that was created for staff and residents, and rewards the

staff for the work they do, it’s an amazing feeling,” Ray said. “I couldn’t be prouder of our staff and what they have accomplished. The award is an accumulation of work Pine Hills has done over the last decade to continuously improve.”

The PbS model is a data-driven improvement model that relies on research collected from facilities. It sets performance-based standards to guide facility operations, services, and programs to help serve youth and staff members. The program provides standards for facility safety, security, programming and youth healthcare.

“We’d like to give a huge congratulations to our partners at Pine Hills for working strategically to create sustainable change in reducing youth confinement,” said Kim Godfrey Lovett, CIYJ executive director. “They’ve been persistent with their efforts and relied on data and new tactics to help the youth residents in Montana. It’s especially fun for me to honor longtime partners as I get ready to retire at the end of the year.”

“I couldn’t be prouder of our staff and what they have accomplished. The award is an accumulation of work Pine Hills has done over the last decade to continuously improve.”
 ~PHCF Warden Steve Ray



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Students are sworn in as Public Safety Officer Standards and Training (POST)-certified officers. DOC Director Brian Gootkin swore in the officers at the end of the ceremony.

During their seven weeks of training, officers complete a variety of courses in the classroom and out in the field. In the classroom,

officers learned about Montana laws, substance abuse and treatment basics, and supervising domestic caseloads. When it was time to get hands-on, they worked through defensive tactics, firearms training, and crisis de-escalation.

John Schaffer, Public Safety Chief for the DOC, highlighted the staff members who help with training at

the academy.

“The trainers with the academy are incredible,” he said. “They come in from all over the state. They take time out of their schedule to come in here and impart their knowledge on these brand-new officers. That to me is an incredible investment by our existing people into our new folks.”



Probation and Parole Officer Ryan-James Helton of Helena participates in a four-man room clearing exercise at the Montana Law Enforcement Academy in Helena.

