



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MONTANA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE LEADS DESIGNATION OF THE HEADWATERS TECHNOLOGY HUB FOR SMART PHOTONICS SENSING

HELENA, MT (October 23, 2023) — Today marks a significant milestone for the state of Montana and our region as the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. Economic Development Administration have Designated the **Headwaters Technology Hub** as a rural [Regional Technology and Innovation Hub](#), one of 31 total designations and a Strategic Planning Grant to prepare for Phase 2 implementation for *smart photonic sensing systems that can be deployed in autonomous systems and applied to critical defense, resource management, and disaster prevention applications*. Only those hubs receiving designation can apply for Phase 2 funding which could be \$500+ million to the hub over the next decade.

The Headwaters Consortium, is a unified, collaborative effort comprised of start-ups/entrepreneurs, industry leaders, state, local and Tribal government entities, economic development organizations, and multiple academic partners centered on centers of excellence in optics, photonics and quantum technologies.

Montana's Congressional Delegates, Senator Jon Tester (D) and Senator Steve Daines (R), and their teams, have demonstrated exemplary bipartisan leadership in delivering this landmark achievement for the Treasure State and our partners in the region.

This tech hub award paves the way for the rapid scaling of commercialization of this leading technology being developed by Montana and North Dakota companies and centers of excellence with existing investments, foundational assets, capabilities, and commitments across our region.

We expect a profound impact that strengthens our leadership and critical resource management - spanning water, agriculture lands, and critical minerals, industrial equipment and processes, infrastructure development, and natural disaster mitigation.

"The designation of Montana as a technology hub is a testament to our commitment to excel on the global stage, enhancing our national defense and competitiveness and securing our technological supply chains," expressed **Todd O'Hair, President & CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce**. "This has the potential to propel our region's economy to unprecedented heights."

Highly regarded industry leaders have also recognized the significance of this designation:

“The gravity of this federal announcement officially designating Montana’s Headwaters Technology Hub cannot be understated. This sets the stage for Montana to lead innovation efforts into the future, requiring significant and sustainable growth in the mining industry. Critical materials and rare earth minerals in our region are key to securing our supply chain and producing photonic sensing systems. Kudos to all the hard work by agencies and officials working together to make this a reality,” said **Nancy Schlepp, Vice President of Communications and Government Relations, Sandfire Resources America; and Chair of the Montana Chamber Board of Directors.**

“Hyundai New Horizons Studio’s selection of Bozeman, Montana as the location of our R&D center was partially based on Montana’s potential and appetite to grow and strengthen the technology ecosystem. The U.S. EDA’s announcement designating the Headwaters as a regional technology and innovation hub validates our assessment. We are looking forward to contributing to the success of this purpose-driven Consortium,” quoted **John Suh, Vice President of Hyundai Motor Group and Founding Director of New Horizons Studio.**

Mark Moran, Head of the John Deere Technology Innovation Center and Lead in Advanced Sensing stated, “The geographic region represented by The Headwaters Tech Hub already provides national leadership in agtech, advanced sensing technologies, and agricultural production in a number of commodities. This investment by the EDA reenforces something that Deere has demonstrated throughout its history: innovation happens not only in large cities and on the coasts, but everywhere in the US.”

Adam Gilbertson, Senior Vice President of Field Technology & Innovation at RDO Equipment Co., added, “Today marks an inflection point for Montana and our wider region as a nationally recognized leader in technology and innovation. This designation for the Headwaters Tech Hub represents a once in a generation opportunity for this region to build on our demonstrated strengths in photonics and quantum technologies. Our team at RDO Equipment Co. and the growers and builders around the region will benefit significantly from the advancements in these technologies.”

Montana’s Congressional Delegates are quoted as saying:

“Innovation can happen in any corner of America, which is why I’ve led the push to bring a Regional Tech Hub to Montana,” said **Montana Senator Jon Tester.** “Today’s designation affirms what Montanans across our state already know to be true: there is untapped potential in rural America, and the Treasure State is ready to lead the nation in strengthening American security through domestic manufacturing and innovation. I’m proud to have led the charge to secure this competitive designation that will unlock new private and federal investments to turbocharge Montana’s economy, small businesses, and academic institutions.”

“Today’s announcement is another milestone for Montana, speaks volumes about the quality of our workforce and further solidifies our standing as a leading hub for cutting

edge technology and research in the country. From optics and photonics to quantum computing, I am grateful help advance Montana's ability to contribute even further to the important research and development that will help strengthen our national security and help us stay competitive against China," **Montana Senator Steve Daines** said.

And **Montana Governor Greg Gianforte** said, "Thanks to our pro-business policies, exceptional quality of life, and the unparalleled work ethic of Montanans, Montana has one of the highest concentrations of optics, photonics, and quantum companies in the United States, and we're just getting started," Governor Gianforte added. "I appreciate the hard work of our state agencies and industry and academic partners to develop Montana's successful proposal, and look forward to the impact of the Headwaters Technology Hub on our state."

At the core of this groundbreaking initiative are programs from our leading research institutions, specifically the Optical Technology Center (OpTeC) at Montana State University, the Montana Photonics and Quantum Industry Alliance, and AccelerateMT at the University of Montana.

Additionally, recent investments in our region for NSF Engines and EPSCoR research funding, play a pivotal role in applying core technologies to address global challenges, thus creating new avenues to engage with underserved and rural populations across the Rocky Mountain and northern Plains region.

For MT Chamber members and industry-related inquiries, please contact:
Matt Olson, Director of Network Development at the Montana Chamber of Commerce at matt@montanachamber.com

###

For Headwaters Consortia details and media contacts, please visit this link:
<https://www.acceleratemt.com/headwatershub>

The Headwaters Consortium, is a unified, collaborative team of start-ups/entrepreneurs, corporations, state, local and Tribal governments, economic development organizations, academic partners and centers of excellence in optics, photonics and quantum technologies. Work on the Headwaters Hub has already brought together 87 organizations from Montana and across the region.

Lead consortium members include:

- Montana Chamber of Commerce
- Montana Department of Commerce
- Montana University System
- Montana Photonics Quantum Alliance

Montana State University
University of Montana
Montana Technological University
AccelerateMT at the University of Montana
Salish Kootenai College
Montana State Department of Labor and Industry
Montana State Tribal Economic Development Commission
Montana Governor's Director of Indian Affairs
Montana State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB)
Aurora Innovations, Inc.
Bridger Photonics
Hyundai America Technical Center, Inc.'s New Horizons Studio
Missoula Economic Partnership
Prospera Business Network
America's Frontier Fund
Homestake Capital
Next Frontier Capital

###

About the Montana Chamber of Commerce

Established in 1937, the Montana Chamber of Commerce is the state's largest business advocacy organization serving its 2,000 members, from sole proprietors to publicly traded companies, and all industry sectors located throughout the 56 counties of the Treasure State.

The Montana Chamber is guided by Envision 2026, a 10-year strategic plan that aims to grow Montana's economy by improving the business climate, ensuring appropriate infrastructure investment, developing a skilled workforce, and promoting entrepreneurship in partnership with its philanthropic arm, the Montana Chamber Foundation.

For more information, visit: www.montanachamber.com.