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MONTANA AWARDED \$41 MILLION FOR HEADWATERS TECHNOLOGY HUB FOCUSED ON SMART PHOTONIC SENSING

HELENA, MT (July 2, 2024) — Today, the Economic Development Administration (EDA) [announced](#) that Montana's Headwaters Tech Hub will receive \$41 million from the [Regional Technology and Innovation Hub Program](#). This funding confirms the State as a global leader in *smart photonic sensing systems and their deployment into industry sectors critical to U.S. national and economic security*. EDA awarded a total of \$504 million to only twelve Tech Hubs across the nation out of more than 300 initial applications. The award is the successful outcome of the team's application package [submitted in late February](#).

"We're thrilled that the decision-makers in DC have recognized the strength of what Montana's tech industry has to offer. This incredible win is the result of more than 18 months of focused effort from an outstanding and deeply committed team. The Tech Hub investment is going to have a profound impact on Montana's economy and will strengthen our nation's security by growing domestic manufacturing and innovation in crucial technology areas" states **Headwaters Tech Hub Executive Director Tim VanReken**.

The Headwaters Tech Hub award paves the way for rapid commercialization of photonics technology into sectors crucial to the state's economy. Developed by Montana with partners in North Dakota, the Headwaters Hub aims to accelerate the pipeline from product introduction to wide market adoption, grow businesses that can compete and thrive in the global marketplace, and strengthen pathways for Montanans to enter and thrive in the region's expanding tech-focused workforce.

The Headwaters Tech Hub Consortium is a unified, collaborative venture comprised of start-ups, entrepreneurs, industry leaders, state, local and Tribal government entities, economic development organizations, and academic partners focused on centers of excellence in optics & photonics, critical resource management, precision agriculture, and related technologies.

Montana's Congressional delegation, including Senator Jon Tester, Senator Steve Daines, and Congressman Ryan Zinke, have demonstrated exemplary bipartisan leadership in delivering this landmark achievement for the Treasure State and our partners in the region.

"The recognition and funding for Montana today punctuates our leadership as the Nation's photonics technology hub. This investment by the US Economic Development Administration will be a catalyst for economic and job growth, and will fuel the generational impact to industries across our state and region," expressed **Todd O'Hair, President & CEO of the Montana Chamber of Commerce**.

“The \$41 million the state received today demonstrates that a rural state like Montana, and our region, can lead the nation on innovation and collaboration. This award recognizes our competitive advantage in sensor technology advancements that will significantly impact the way that the world does business. The Montana Department of Commerce is proud to have lead this effort, since February of 2023, with industry and university leaders, and dozens of collaborative partners. Go Montana!”, added **Paul Green, Director of the Montana Department of Commerce**.

“Montanans' unparalleled work ethic is widely recognized, and today's significant investment announcement highlights our capability to excel on the global stage. At the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, our mission is to empower Montanans through work and opportunity every day. We are excited to continue our deep partnership with the Headwaters Tech Hub, working together with leaders of industry and labor on the State Workforce Innovation Board to create sustainable, high-tech training and employment pathways, especially for those in our rural, tribal, and underserved communities. This collaboration will ensure that all Montanans have access to the skills and opportunities to thrive in the rapidly evolving tech industry,” said **Sarah Swanson, Commissioner of the Montana Department of Labor & Industry**.

Montana academic leaders had this to say about today's announcement:

“The close link between Montana's universities and new high tech business in optics and photonics, agriculture, resource management, and biotechnology is an untold success story of rural innovation benefitting students and communities” said **Montana Commissioner of Higher Education, Clayton Christian**.

“Through the transformative tech hub investment, Montana will build technology and jobs that will shape the next century while creating new opportunities for young Montanans to stay here, train here, and find work in great paying jobs.”

“The Headwaters Tech Hub is a big win for UM, Montana, and this entire region of the country,” said **University of Montana President Seth Bodnar**. “This is a catalyst for what will be a truly transformative impact for our state and region through the advancement of photonic smart sensors for application in natural resource management and autonomous systems. Thank you to Senator Tester for leading success in this effort.”

“This is an incredible opportunity for Montana State University's top-tier research enterprise and longstanding expertise to help deepen the state's technology economy, provide critical technologies for our nation, and promote strong, good paying careers for our graduates,” said **Montana State University President Dr. Waded Cruzado**. “Our students, who will be the next leaders of Montana's industries, will benefit tremendously from the opportunities this grant will provide.”

“The Tech Hub funding will enable a field-testing station to be located on and adjacent to Montana Tech’s campus, repurposing mine lands to create one-of-a-kind testing facilities that push the limits of new photonics and sensor technologies, including rugged terrain, extreme elevation changes, temperature extremes, and access to underground mining tunnels. This field-scale testing facility expands the current uses of the Underground Mine Education Center, leveraging our expert faculty and expanding training opportunities for our students. Montana Tech is enthusiastic to be part of this transformative opportunity and welcomes the economic benefits it will provide to the campus and community,” said **Dr. Angela Lueking, Vice Chancellor for Research and Dean of the Graduate School at Montana Technological University.**

Industry and community leaders also recognize the significance of this award:

"This EDA funding will transform the landscape of Montana's thriving photonics and quantum communities, generating thousands of high-paying jobs, advancing cutting-edge photonic technologies, and establishing career paths for Montana's most valuable resource, our children. Montana's future looks brighter than ever," said **Jason Yager, Executive Director of the Montana Photonics and Quantum Alliance.**

“The Headwaters Tech Hub designation and now initial funding represents a significant new path for innovation in America’s rural states. The work ahead in remote sensing and photonics as they relate to industries important to this region have the potential to reshape our regional economy and impact American leadership on a global scale. While this is a significant grant award, it represents an initial investment in a much greater effort. Our team at RDO Equipment Co. looks forward to supporting this important work and cannot wait to get started!”, added **Adam Gilbertson, Senior Vice President, Field Technology & Innovation at RDO Equipment Co.**

"Today's announcement from the Economic Development Administration highlights America's dedication to technological leadership and underscores Montana's innovative capabilities. Aurora is proud to reaffirm our commitment to Montana, enhancing America's economic competitiveness and leadership in photonics technology," said **Gerardo Interiano, Senior Vice President of Government Relations and Public Affairs at Aurora Innovation.**

"This partnership exemplifies Grand Farm's commitment to advancing agricultural technology and addressing growers' challenges across diverse environments," said **Dr. William Aderholdt, Executive Director of Grand Farm** in North Dakota. "By contributing precision agriculture test bed capabilities to the Headwaters Tech Hub, we are poised to validate and deploy cutting-edge smart sensors and photonics, driving innovation and supporting the broader goals of the consortium."

“We’re thrilled that the US EDA is providing \$41M to bolster Montana’s leading photonics industry. We have a global impact and it’s driven by the talented and hardworking individuals that form our community. The EDA funding will help provide the local workforce with skills and resources needed to continue our exciting growth and achieve an even greater impact from right here in Montana,” said **Dr. Asa Carre-Burritt, Director of Policy and External Affairs for Bridger Photonics, Inc.**

“This funding affirms our belief in Montana as a prime location for high-tech industry. We at Reveal thank our elected officials, the Department of Commerce, and the Headwaters Tech Hub team for their hard work in securing this funding for the state. Reveal is committed to working with Montana’s universities, government, and private sector to further the state’s position as a leading technology-focused economy delivering meaningful autonomy, robotics and photonics solutions for the US national security enterprise,” added **Garrett Smith, CEO of Reveal Technology, Inc.**

Montana’s Congressional Delegates are quoted as saying:

Senator Jon Tester (D-MT): “Montana is a big state that can do big things, and we’ve proven that we have what it takes to lead the nation in technological innovation that will ensure America can continue to outcompete countries like China. That’s exactly why I fought to secure this major \$41 million investment for the Headwaters Tech Hub, and it’s why I’ve served as a leading voice in the Senate advocating for the untapped potential of rural America. Bringing good-paying jobs back to the United States, securing our domestic supply chains, and developing next generation technology starts with investments right here in the Treasure State, and I will continue to partner with the Headwaters team to make sure they have the resources they need to succeed.”

Senator Steve Daines (R-MT): “Montana is leading the country in tech innovation, which will help us win the race against China, create good-paying jobs here at home and further boost our economy. From optics and photonics to quantum computing, I am grateful to help advance Montana’s ability to contribute even further to the important research, development, and jobs that will help strengthen our national security and help the country stay competitive globally.”

Congressman Ryan Zinke (R-MT-01): “It’s great to know good decisions still come out of Washington. Working with the organizers of the Tech Hub over the last year and a half to get this project funded has been a long and rewarding venture. The grant award proves the caliber of Montana’s tech capabilities and now the economic impact to our state and the ability to keep Montana STEM grads in Montana is only strengthened. Bravo zulu to all!”

The EDA support will go toward several projects focused on advancing the technology envelope and strengthening workforce in the region, along with building up

organizational capacity to accelerate the growth of the regional tech ecosystem. Individual projects will be led by the University of Montana, Montana State University, Salish Kootenai College, the Montana Photonics and Quantum Alliance, and Accelerate Montana. Numerous government, academic, non-profit, and industry partners will also be crucial to the success of the Hub's ambitious portfolio of projects.

The Headwaters Tech Hub consists of a 27-member consortium supported but hundreds of partner organizations across the state and region.

Consortium members include:

- 1) Accelerate Montana
- 2) America Achieves
- 3) America's Frontier Fund
- 4) Aurora Innovation
- 5) Bridger Photonics
- 6) Butte Local Development Corporation
- 7) Grand Farm
- 8) HomeStake Collaborative Finance
- 9) John Deere
- 10) Missoula Economic Partnership
- 11) Montana Chamber of Commerce
- 12) Montana Photonics & Quantum Alliance
- 13) Montana State University
- 14) Montana State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB)
- 15) Montana Technological University
- 16) Montana Department of Labor & Industry
- 17) Montana Department of Commerce
- 18) Montana Governor's Office of Indian Affairs
- 19) Montana Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.
- 20) Next Frontier Capital
- 21) Prospera
- 22) RDO Equipment Co.
- 23) Reveal Technology, Inc.
- 24) Salish Kootenai College
- 25) State Tribal Economic Development Commission
- 26) University of Montana
- 27) Vision Aerial

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